THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

JUST A BIG SEXY JOKE?

GETTING TAKEN SERIOUSLY IN WOMEN'S ROLLER DERBY

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Abstract

Roller derby is an emergent women's sport; self-organized on a not-for-profit, do-it-yourself model it initially developed outside existing sports institutions and remains un-professionalized. Roller derby thus occupies an ambivalent position of gendered alterity in relation to a broader cultural field of sport, where women's struggles for sporting legitimacy are well rehearsed in the literature. Existing research interprets roller derby as a unique context, particularly conducive to re-configurations of both gender and sport. Despite such uniqueness, research participants increasingly claim roller derby's similarity to other sports practices, become concerned with its recognition as a 'real, legitimate sport' and orientate their practice towards *getting taken seriously.*

I develop an 'insider' ethnographic account from analysis of five years of participant observation with one roller derby league of approximately 100 members, including 26 in-depth interviews and a collaborative film-making project. The thesis responds to a broad question, 'how is getting taken seriously negotiated in practice?' and analyses shifts in participants' gendered self-representations, the bureaucratization of a 'by the skaters, for the skaters' organizational ethos, and the institution of competition. As participants work to diminish distinctions between roller derby and 'sport', they enact a set of related distinctions between; what the league *used to be like* and what it *became; who* roller derby is and is not *by and for;* and practices that are and are not condusive to serious recognition. As participants' definitions of roller derby move away from 'a sport for women who don't like sport' towards 'a sport for people who really, really like sport' a second over-arching question arises; in seeking serious recognition did the league eventually become what it once defined itself in opposition to? Concentrating on moments when participants' claims for serious *recognition* refuse and rework the gendered terms of such intelligibility, I argue that a sociological analysis of seriousness is crucial to understanding such fateful dilemmas. Enactments of non-/seriousness enable skaters to create new organizational and representational praxis, identities, meanings and relations, as they negotiate the possibilities and limits of working together to make something relatively new. Non-/seriousness is how participants move between roller derby, sport and gender as inevitable, singular, certain and beyond their influence and yet malleable, contingent, multiple, ambivalent and created in their own actions. Four interludes, between chapters, reflect on non-/seriousness in 'insider' research. The interludes interrupt and expand upon the thesis' central analytical contentions; that analyzing non-/seriousness both enhances and unsettles our understanding of familiar sociological preoccupations with gender, organization and mid-ranges of agency between dichotomies of voluntarism and determinism.

Declaration

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This thesis is my own work, apart from where otherwise indicated, and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Maddie Breeze

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Contents

Abbreviations & Terminology

BGGW Bad Girl, Good Woman Productions

DIY Do It Yourself

BRSF British Roller Sports Federation

MRDA Men's Roller Derby Association

NSO Non-Skating Official

UKRDA United Kingdom Roller Derby Association

WFTDA Women's Flat Track Roller Derby Association

League: I use 'league' to refer to the research context, the organization as a whole, and to all skaters, referees and non-skating members of the organization.

Participants: Refers directly to those skaters, referees and non-skating members who took part in interviews and film-making workshops, or who are involved in the research as key informants.

Skaters: Indicates a broader conception of people who play, or have played, roller derby with the league, and occasionally to those who skate for other leagues as indicated in the main text.

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I am but all too conscious of the fact that we are born in an age when only the dull are treated seriously, and I live in terror of not being misunderstood

- Oscar Wilde, 1969

You've been drawn into fighting the war on their terms, when Battersea Art Centre was threatened with closure because of the withdrawing of funding from Wandsworth City Council, and when Shepherds Bush Theatre was threatened with closure because of the withdrawal of funding from the Arts Council, the bigwigs from both these places engaged with their detractors by saying "but look, we developed Jerry Springer The Opera and that went on to the West End and made loads of money for businesses…" but what they should have said was "look, we put on, for a week, a bloke blowing into a balloon and making funny sounds and that *didn't* transfer to the West End because it has *no commercial future*, but it is inherently worthwhile", that's what they should have said and that's why it needs funding, but instead, they engage on their terms and they've already lost, because they talk as if the only point of the arts were to make money for shops in the West End because people on the way to the theatre were buying crisps, and you've already lost.

- Stewart Lee, 2010

1. Introduction 'Sport For Women Who Don't Like Sport'?

So, what do you think your PhD will be about now that derby's so different to when you started?

Aladdin, field-notes, December 2011

I'm walking back into town with Aladdin after two hours of roller derby practice at a new venue, the sports hall at Queen Margaret University. It's a cool early Saturday evening late in November 2011. We were cycling the seven-mile journey but Aladdin has a pain in her shoulder, exacerbated by training and by her heavy back-pack full of kit, so with a few miles left to go we get off and walk, pushing our bikes through the outskirts of the city and through the dusk. Tomorrow will bring the first session of a new round of the 'Fresh Meat' programme, in which new skaters are initiated into the league through 16 weeks of basic skills and 'minimum standards' training, in order that they become eligible for full membership. While these hopeful new recruits may be familiar with roller derby from spectating at a bout, watching video footage online, or from the 2010 UK release of the Hollywood film 'Whip It!', for the majority the initial two-hour Fresh Meat session will be their very first roller derby practice. It will be the first time they lace up their quad skates, pull on a helmet, knee pads, elbow pads and wrist guards, experience the slobbery lisp initiated by wearing a mouth guard and take their first, often unsteady, nervous and very sweaty strides on eight wheels into the world of roller derby.

Aladdin is scheduled to coach this initial practice, and as we walk home she plans how she will introduce roller derby to the new skaters. She has already achieved notoriety among a previous 'batch' of Fresh Meat, by telling them, in no uncertain terms; 'you will cry at least once during practice, and you will throw up'. The next day, in another sports center on the edge of the city and after the main league practice, I overhear as Aladdin instructs about 25 new skaters, who are sat around awkwardly and listening enthusiastically; 'People used to say that roller derby was "like sport for women who don't like sport", but actually, it is for people who really, really like sport'.

This thesis is an account of five years of ethnographic research based in my own personal involvement with roller derby in Edinburgh, with the Auld Reekie Roller Girls league, an organization that I helped to inaugurate from scratch in April 2008. Writing this introduction is a question of developing a definition, and offering an

explanation, of roller derby, in a context where what roller derby *is* is subject to change and contestation. Research participants are faced with tasks of definition too, as when skaters encounter those as yet unfamiliar with the newly emergent, do-it-yourself (DIY), women-led sports practice that is contemporary roller derby. For instance, when Aladdin (who chose her own pseudonym for the research) introduces new recruits to the league. In roller derby 'league' has a slightly different usage to what readers might expect. Leagues are stand-alone organizations, geographically located and comprising anything from just 10 to more than one hundred members, that field between one and three 'travel teams' to compete against teams from other leagues around the UK and increasingly from mainland Europe and North America.

Especially in the early days of my own involvement, 'what is roller derby?' was a tediously familiar question, asked by sleazy men in bars, curious family and friends and cynical fellow academics alike. Pauline Baynes (a skater and research participant) and I used to make a joke of this, repeatedly asking each other in a faux-naïve voice 'what *is* a roller derby?' the 'a' in our snarky intonation indicative of the supposed ignorance of our imagined interlocutors; *we* knew what roller derby was, *they* did not.

In the first half of this introduction I use (i) the rules of the game; (ii) accounts of roller derby's history; (iii) my involvement in the league's beginnings; and (iv) a discussion of the initial inspiration for research, to introduce the league I research with and roller derby more broadly. Roller derby is played predominantly by women, is self-organized on a not-for-profit model, initially developed outside existing sports institutions and remains un-professionalized. Roller derby thus occupies an ambivalent position of gendered alterity in relation to a broader cultural field of sport, where women's struggles for sporting legitimacy are well rehearsed in the literature. Existing research interprets roller derby as a unique context, particularly conducive to re-configurations of both gender and sport. However, in the second half of this chapter I introduce participants' concerns with *getting taken seriously* and 'seriousness' as a key concept and thus situate the research aims and questions, before giving an overview of each subsequent chapter. The thesis developed alongside participants' increasing claims for roller derby's *similarity* to other sports

practices, as skaters increasingly orientated their practice towards roller derby's recognition as a 'real, legitimate, serious sport'.

Rules of the Game

At its simplest roller derby is a full contact, simultaneous offense/defense team race. In practice however, it is almost always much more complicated than that. Roller derby is played between two teams with 14 skaters apiece, on a flat oval track, most commonly marked out in gaffer-tape on the floor of an indoor sports court. Matches, 'bouts' in roller derby terminology, take place in front of audiences of between 100 and 700 people, and last one hour split into two thirty minute halves, which in turn are subdivided into 'jams' that last a maximum of two minutes each. Each team fields five skaters per jam, the remaining players wait on the team's bench at the side of the track, and are organized by their line-up manager in anticipation of when, at the end of each jam, there is a thirty-second pause in game-play while both teams field a fresh set of five skaters to the track.

One skater from each five is the jammer, identifiable by the star on her helmet cover. The jammer is the point scorer, and achieves one point for every opposition skater she passes without fouling and legally within the track boundaries. Both jammers line up slightly behind the other skaters, the 'blockers', four for each team. At the whistle signaling for the jam to begin both teams jostle each other frantically, and strategically, for position; skaters plant themselves in the way of their opponents, skate full force into members of the opposite team, form 'walls' with their team-mates and begin to move in roughly the same direction, anti-clockwise, around the track. Each jammer must pass through, and over-take, the 'pack' made up of blockers from both teams. Blockers are simultaneously engaged in assisting their jammer and impeding the passage of the opposing jammer, and use hip-checks, shoulder-checks and full-body checks to knock their opponents down or off the track, as well as tactical variations in speed, direction of travel, and pack formation.

The first jammer to make her way through the pack, without picking up any penalties, is awarded 'lead jammer' status, this brings the strategic advantage of being able to 'call-off the jam' and end gameplay before the end of the two-minute

jam, often preventing the opposing jammer from scoring. Speed is important for jammers; once they break through the pack on their initial pass they need to sprint around the track to fully lap and catch up with the pack from behind, in order to make their way through the pack again. It is only on this second pass through the pack that jammers can start accumulating one point for every opposing blocker they legally pass without committing a penalty.

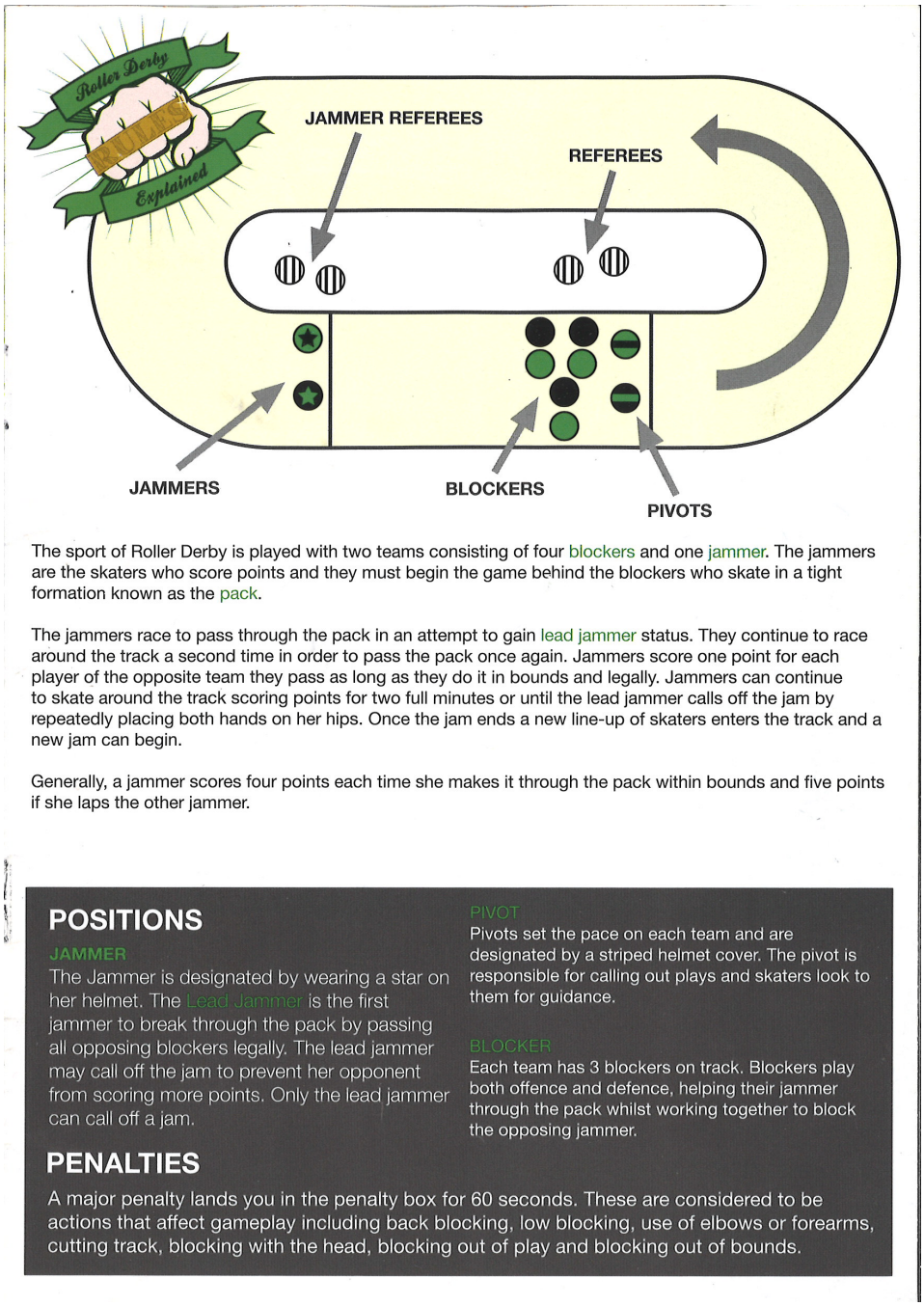

FIGURE 1.1 ROLLER DERBY RULES EXPLAINED. COURTESY OF ARRG. 2013 HOME SEASON.

As well as speed, good jammers need high levels of stamina and fitness to recover from the hits they receive and to keep sprinting for up to two minutes at a time. Agility is also essential, in order to rapidly adjust speed and direction in response to blockers trying to hit them down or out of bounds, and to dodge around positional formations of blockers designed to get in their way and slow them down, or foul them out. In turn, the four blockers from each team will be slowing down the pace of the pack to ease their own jammer's passage, trying to dominate or control the opposing blockers and distract them from their jammer's approach, or conversely speeding up the pack to make it harder for the opposition jammer to pass and collect points. At the time of writing a popular defensive tactic is to force a jammer off-track, to the inside or outside of the track boundary, and then swiftly skate backwards, or transition to skating clockwise, for as far as possible around the track, thus forcing the jammer to re-enter the track some distance behind where she left it, and causing her to loose valuable time, momentum and position relative to the pack.

The rules of contemporary, flat-track women's roller derby are devised, maintained and updated by the international governing body for women's flat track roller derby, the Women's Flat Track Roller Derby Association, which is based in the USA and began as the United League's Coalition in 2004 (WFTDA, 2013a). The WFTDA is overseen by a five-member volunteer board of directors, all skaters or retired skaters. In 2009 WFTDA hired its first employees, an Executive Director and an Insurance Administrator (WFTDA, 2009). The rules governing roller derby game-play currently fill a 68-page document[1].

Penalties include blocking to or with the head, blocking another skater in the back, tripping, and elbowing, as well as 'cutting track' (skating outside the track boundaries and then reentering to gain tactical advantage), 'blocking out of bounds' (initiating contact outside the track boundaries) and 'blocking out of play' (initiating contact beyond the defined 'pack' of skaters), and can earn the responsible skater a

[1] The full rule-set has been omitted from the appendix due to length considerations, but is available to download at: http://wftda.com/rules.

trip to the penalty box for one or even two minutes, during which time her team must skate short. 'Insubordination', including 'the repeated use of obscene, profane, or abusive language or gestures directed at an official' and 'misconduct', for instance 'executing a block on an opponent who is down' are also punishable offences, as is 'gross misconduct', for which a skater can be expelled from the bout, and which includes 'fighting', 'biting' and 'jumping on to or in to a pile of fighting skaters' (WFTDA, 2013b: n/p).

During bouts a crew of on-skates referees and non-skating officials (NSOs), all of whom are usually affiliated to leagues, are responsible for enforcing the rules, keeping the score and calling and tracking penalties. Especially in the earliest days of contemporary roller derby in the UK, between 2008-2010 referee positions were filled predominantly by men. Refereeing was generally seen as an acceptable and supportive way for men to get involved in women's roller derby, and many skaters successfully persuaded their husbands, male partners, friends and brothers to join a league and train to become referees.

History

US-based Skater-authored accounts trace *contemporary* roller derby's emergence to Austin, Texas and the years 2000-2001 (Barbee & Cohen, 2010; Joulwan, 2007; Mabe, 2007), but draw on a longer history of various incarnations of the sport. Barbee & Cohen cite an 'unprecedented six-day skating marathon' (2010: 11) held at Madison Square Gardens in 1885 and the roller-skating races that took place there periodically for the next fifty years (ibid: 12). In 1930s North America Leo Seltzer, a former film-distributor, was promoting 'derbies', or 'Transcontinental Roller Derby'; marathon races played by mixed-sex couples trading laps on a banked track until they had skated 57,000 laps, or roughly the distance between New York and Los Angeles (ibid: 11), New York and San Diego (Joulwan, 2007: 45) or just 'across the United States' (Mabe, 2007: 23). At this time roller derby was essentially a feat of endurance, a cheap form of depression-era entertainment (ibid: 21).

However, popular narrative describes how, along with a sports writer called Damon Runyon, Seltzer noticed that spectators responded most enthusiastically to collisions

between skaters (Mabe, 2007: 31), ‘when bodies hit the floor’ (Barbee & Cohen, 2010: 14) or ‘bickering, brawls and bad blood’ (Joulwan, 2007: 46). Seltzer thus devised a set of rules that incorporated full body contact and the accumulation of points, with two co-ed teams ‘battling it out’ (Mabe, 2007: 32) and in which ‘feuds, fistfights, and a point system became standard parts of the action’ (Joulwan, 2007: 46).

Seltzer promoted mixed-sex ‘roller derbies’ until the 1950s, with ‘dramatic fights’ and ‘pre-scripted antics’ (Murray, 2012: 68) continuing to characterize the action that was increasingly televised, so much that audiences were soon ‘oversaturated’ (Mabe, 2007: 46). Deford suggests that in the early 1950s Seltzer attempted to minimize spectacularly contrived fights and feuds, so that roller derby might ‘restructure itself as a serious sport’ (1971: 73). In 1958 however, amid waning audiences, and after brief trips to England, France and Spain (Mabe, 2007: 43) Seltzer passed on his business to his son, Jerry (Barbee & Cohen, 2010: 21) who emphasized ‘outrageous, and bigger-than-life personality skaters’ (ibid) and approached roller derby ‘like the money-making venture it was’ (Mabe, 2007: 43).

Jerry Seltzer’s roller derby folded in 1972 (Barbee & Cohen, 2010: 24) with television coverage almost lost, and was followed by the even ‘more outlandish theatrics’ (Mabe, 2007: 47) of the televised ‘Roller Games’ (Barbee & Cohen, 2010: 24) which itself folded by the end of 1973 (ibid). In the United States various co-ed incarnations of roller derby continued through the 1970s and into the ‘spandex years’ (ibid: 25) of the 1980s when the televised ‘Rock-n-Roller-Games’ (ibid), or just ‘RollerGames’ (Mabe, 2007: 48) incorporated a figure-eight track, wall-of-death and alligator pits, around which skaters raced to break ties, pushing the losers into the pit for a bout of alligator wrestling (Barbee & Cohen, 2010: 26; Mabe, 2007: 48). ‘RollerGames’ lasted less than a year (Barbee & Cohen, 2010: 26; Mabe, 2007: 48).

In 1998 Jerry Seltzer was back on the scene as the ‘commissioner’ of ‘Rollerjam’ and the new ‘World Skating League’; another novel, still mixed-sex, version of roller derby this time played on inline skates. Rollerjam was orchestrated for television right from the start, via the financial backing of The Nashville Network (Barbee & Cohen, 2010: 27, Mabe, 2007: 51). While the alligator pits were gone, Rollerjam was

resolutely ‘sports entertainment’ (Barbee & Cohen, 2010: 27) striving to ‘straddle the fine line between pure athleticism and good old-fashioned entertainment’ (Mabe, 2007: 51). Rollerjam was essentially a ‘reality [TV] show mixed with sport’ (ibid: 54) with ‘concocted plots’ (ibid) rivalries, love-affairs and friendships between teams invented and mobilized as marketing strategies. Murray (2012: 69) describes how in the UK, ‘RollerBlaze’, a modified version of Rollerjam, took place between 1999-2001, with teams often emphasizing the importance of women’s participation in their skater recruitment. After two years and as ratings began to dwindle Rollerjam’s producers ushered in a return to ‘catfights and hair-pulling’ (Barbee & Cohen, 2020: 31), increasingly ‘skimpy’ costumes (ibid) and ‘evening gown battles’ (Mabe, 2007: 57) until eventually ‘the sport was overshadowed by storylines borrowed from pro wrestling’ (Joulwan, 2007: 51). The final episode of Rollerjam aired in January 2001.

Stories of roller derby’s twentieth century origins and development, especially as told retrospectively by participants in twenty-first century roller derby (Barbee & Cohen, Joulwan, Mabe [US] and Murray [UK] are all skaters), combine several key themes that are central to both the 2001 emergence of contemporary derby and to this thesis. All the incarnations of roller derby iterated above involved men and women on the same teams, even though in practice game-play was often segregated according to sex, with men and women rarely on the track together (Murray, 2012: 54). Discourses of essential binary gender difference are implicated in roller derby’s historical striving to ‘straddle the fine line between pure athleticism and good old-fashioned entertainment’ (Mabe, 2007: 51):

> Certainly, there is no doubt that it is the women who give the game its tawdry, sideshow image. But there is also no doubt that it is the girls who bring people into the arenas – even if the fans stay to enjoy the faster, harder men’s play more (Deford 1971: 48-49).

While in the twentieth century the ‘outlandish theatrics’ or ‘tawdry, sideshow image’ of much roller derby interrupts the straightforward classification of participants as ‘professional athletes’ these skaters were paid to skate, earning a living through roller derby. Similarly twentieth century roller derby was a ‘money-making venture’,

each incarnation was explicitly designed, managed, promoted and mass-mediated, with a view to making profit, 'Leo [Seltzer] was determined that television took note of his sport' (Mabe, 2007: 38). The organizational work of roller derby was performed by managers and promoters, who were predominantly men.

The emergence of contemporary, twenty-first century roller derby can also be partly credited to the work of a man, 'Devil' Dan Policarpo, who in January 2001 recruited women from the alternative bar scene in Austin, Texas; Policarpo had a vision of a resurrected carnivalesque roller derby, with bears, unicycles and fire (Murray, 2012: 11) as well as 'midgets' and 'multimedia presentations' (Barbee & Cohen, 2007: 33). According to Brick, Policarpo explicitly recruited women 'with tattoos, Bettie Page haircuts and guts' (2008: np) and formed them into four teams; Putas del Fuego, Hellcats, Holy Rollers and the Rhinestone Cowgirls (Barbee & Cohen, 2007: 33). The women took on new pseudonyms; Electra Blu, Lunatic, Bettie Rage, Sparkle Plenty and La Muerta, and Policarpo chose four of them as team captains (ibid).

In the wake of a fundraiser held later that year Policarpo disappeared from Austin. The team captains assumed leadership roles and dubbed themselves 'The She-E-Os' (Barbee & Cohen, 2007: 36), and inaugurated their league as 'Bad Girl Good Woman Productions' (Mabe, 2007: 61). The skaters trained themselves, adapted the rules, self-funded their teams and held their first public bouts in the summer of 2002 (ibid). Mabe suggests that this new form of roller derby 'added a new twist to the sport – no men allowed' (2007: 61). Or in the words of La Muerta, 'Devil Dan bought the matches, but we provided the flame' (quoted in Barbee & Cohen, 2007: 43).

The 'She-E-Os' remained in leadership positions, and as they 'began to take steps to transform the league into a for-profit, registered business, where they would maintain most of the control' (Barbee & Cohen 2010; 44) the majority of the skaters began to dispute their leadership, arguing instead for:

> …communal ownership, where every skater had a voice. The goal, in their eyes was less about making money, and more about simply sustaining and promoting the sport they'd grown to love (ibid).

Management disputes eventually resulted in a split. Fifteen skaters, the She-E-Os and their supporters, remained with BGGW and became TXRD Lonestar Rollergirls, continuing to skate on a banked track, while 65 skaters left to form a new group, Texas Rollergirls, skating on a flat track (ibid: 44-45). Texas Rollergirls are widely recognized as the first example of women's flat track roller derby, and thus of contemporary roller derby (Barbee & Cohen, 2010; Joulwan, 2007; Mabe, 2007).

Skating on a flat track eliminated the need for the expensive and time-consuming construction of a banked track; roller derby could now be played almost anywhere with a flat surface and soon spread to major cities across the United States and Canada, and to the UK in 2006 with the inauguration of the London Roller Girls (LRG), followed soon after by a second league, the London Rockin' Rollers (LRR) and by leagues in Birmingham and Glasgow in 2007. This form of roller derby was not-for-profit and played by women, who skated and organized their own leagues as amateurs and volunteers on a DIY model.

While re-tellings of roller derby's colourful history often articulate its contemporary women-led, DIY and not-for-profit organizational ethos in contrast to previous incarnations, a great deal of continuity resides in how skaters today are still struggling to strike a 'delicate balance of sport and color [sic]' (Mabe, 2007: 58) and wrestling with very similar issues to those that Leo Seltzer faced in the 1950s in trying to 'restructure' roller derby as a 'serious sport' (Deford, 1971: 73).

While it is tempting to assert that roller derby petered out in the past because of contrived spectacle, managed by men in pursuit of profit, the more sensational elements continued well into its contemporary revival, as did perennial tensions between 'pure athleticism and good old-fashioned entertainment' (Mabe, 2007: 51). BGGW introduced a 'penalty wheel' to their bouts, spun when skaters committed a foul. The spin of the wheel consigned skaters to a fate of forfeited points, or alternatively to a trip down 'spank alley' in which audience members would line up for a chance to slap the offending skater's buttocks (Barbee & Cohen, 2010: 38). While the penalty wheel didn't survive the transition to the flat-track, defining roller derby, as a 'sport for women who don't like sport' and/or as 'for people who really, really like sport' takes place in this inherited context, as well as in relation to a

broader field of sport in which gender is very much at stake; defining roller derby is part of its gendered struggle for sporting legitimacy.

Skaters taking on new 'derby names', wearing clothes more akin to themed costumes than sports uniforms, frequently including fishnet tights or other novelty hosiery, knee-high socks, make-up or 'war-paint', short skirts or hot-pants, were all common practice at founding of the Edinburgh league in 2008 and at the beginning of the research in 2010. Variously described in terms of a 'feminine-punk' aesthetic (Carlson, 2010: 434) or a 'violent, sexually raw femininity' (ibid: 433) these features, alongside contemporary roller derby's women-led, DIY character form the backbone of existing research (Beaver, 2012; Carlson, 2010, 2011; Cohen, 2008; Finley, 2010; Hern, 2010; Murray, 2012; Pavlidis, 2012; Pavlidis & Fulagar, 2013). This combination of characteristics was also what I was initially attracted to as a roller derby participant.

The League

I first heard about roller derby through a friend, Beryl, who I worked nights with in a pub in the center of town. I was in the last months of my undergraduate degree, waiting aimlessly for the as-yet-unspecified next stage of my life to start. I spent a lot of time drinking, in various bars, with Beryl and our other work-mates. During one of these sessions, early in 2008, Beryl excitedly proposed that we should start a roller derby league in Edinburgh. She had seen a recruitment poster (a white skull and crossbones with a crash helmet on a black background) for Glasgow Roller Girls (GRG) and, not knowing what this intriguing phenomenon was, spent some hours online finding out. I listened to her superlative-filled descriptions of tattooed, punk-rock 'badass' women in the United States, skating furiously around a track and battling for points by knocking each other to the ground. Even as a child I did not, could not, roller skate, and the idea that *we* could do something like what Beryl described was completely implausible. I made appropriately enthusiastic but non-committal noises while thinking quietly to myself 'Roller derby? I'll just go along with the idea for a few days, this'll never actually happen'. There was no doubt in my mind; *I* wouldn't be playing roller derby any time soon.

I found myself, about two weeks later, in the upstairs back room of a bar in the city center, gathered around a table with 16 other women. Beryl had posted an 'advert' online, looking for other women who were interested in starting a roller derby league in Edinburgh. There were a few familiar faces that I recognized from the pub and from going to gigs, and some new ones too. Armalite Angie, a skater from GRG, had also seen the advert and came along to offer her support. We listened wide-eyed as she detailed what roller derby actually involved and I passed around a crumpled sheet of A4 paper for everyone to write down their email address. I can still remember standing outside, smoking in the drizzling rain, as the realization dawned on me that this thing called 'roller derby', which I still didn't fully understand, was something that I wanted to spend a great deal of time and effort making happen. That scrappy 'meeting' was the beginning of what was to be my first taste of organizing collectively with a group of women, and clichéd as it is to say it now, it was a turning point in my life.

The following week, Beryl, Busty Malone, Irene Brew, Rose and I caught the bus through to Glasgow, to watch a GRG practice. We found our way to the sports hall and watched wide-eyed as about thirty women skated around an oval track marked out on the polished wooden floor with scuffed plastic cones. I stood close to the wall, trying to keep out of the way at the same time as looking like I knew what was going on. I was awe-struck. I wanted to be like them. I wanted to do what they did, which was to do things I didn't understand, things that looked wild and difficult and strange, on roller-skates.

At this point leagues could only be found in London, Birmingham and Glasgow, and GRG were preparing for their first ever bout, against London Roller Girls (LRG). I watched them stretch (stretches I later tried on my living room floor when my flat-mate was out and got tangled up trying to remember where their legs and arms had been, where mine should be…) and held a kick-boxing pad while they skated into it at full force, practicing what I later discovered were shoulder and hip checks. Someone, I think it might have been Maddy Hacket or Viper Den, two sisters, asked if any of us wanted to try on their skates. I sat on the floor and nervously laced up the worn boots, four wheels on each, which came up just to my ankles, and hoped I was

doing it right. I tried to stand up and immediately fell forwards, flapping my arms and over-balancing, several times. As I tried to stand it felt as if my wheeled feet would shoot forward and I would fall backwards. I responded to my own lack of balance by stiffening my limbs, which just made it much worse. I laughed and grabbed hold of people and fell flat on my backside. Someone shouted 'get some pads on her will you!' and I was hastily strapped into kneepads that made it feel like I was falling on cushions. I crawled around on all fours laughing to hide my embarrassment and disappointment.

On the bus back we talked incessantly about what *we* would do in *our* league; roller derby was definitely going to happen in Edinburgh. We listened to songs that could be our anthem, we talked about logos and uniforms and names and team colours. Soon I was cutting out words and pictures to assemble posters and flyers to advertise our next meeting, I found a picture of a screaming toddler on skates and framed it with the words 'BE A ROLLER GIRL…GET INVOLVED!!!' in a blood-dripping horror-film-style font (figure 1.2). I photocopied them and we stuck them up all over town, in coffee shops, universities, pubs, bars, clubs, tattoo parlors and internet cafes. There were more than 40 people at that next meeting just a few weeks later.

We had our first practice on April 6th 2008, a Sunday afternoon in a church hall. It cost eight pounds to hire the hall for two hours and we covered this with the pound coins and small change that we collected in a crumpled brown envelope and left for the churchwarden. I was tasked with writing the email announcing this first practice to the embryonic league's mailing list and, in conversation with Beryl, Busty, Pearl and Rose we decided that calling what we were about to embark upon 'training' was a bad idea. Beryl thought that the idea of 'training' might discourage people who didn't see themselves as sporty from coming along and having a go. 'Training' seemed to convey off-putting notions clustered around ideas of hard work, elite sport, fitness and sporting experience; training might make it seem too serious and too much of a sport. We settled on 'practice' as a more inviting terminology for what was to take place in that church hall (adorned with notices about coffee mornings, jumble sales and Sunday school) each Sunday afternoon in the weeks before Busty secured us a twice-weekly slot in a sports hall on the other side of town.

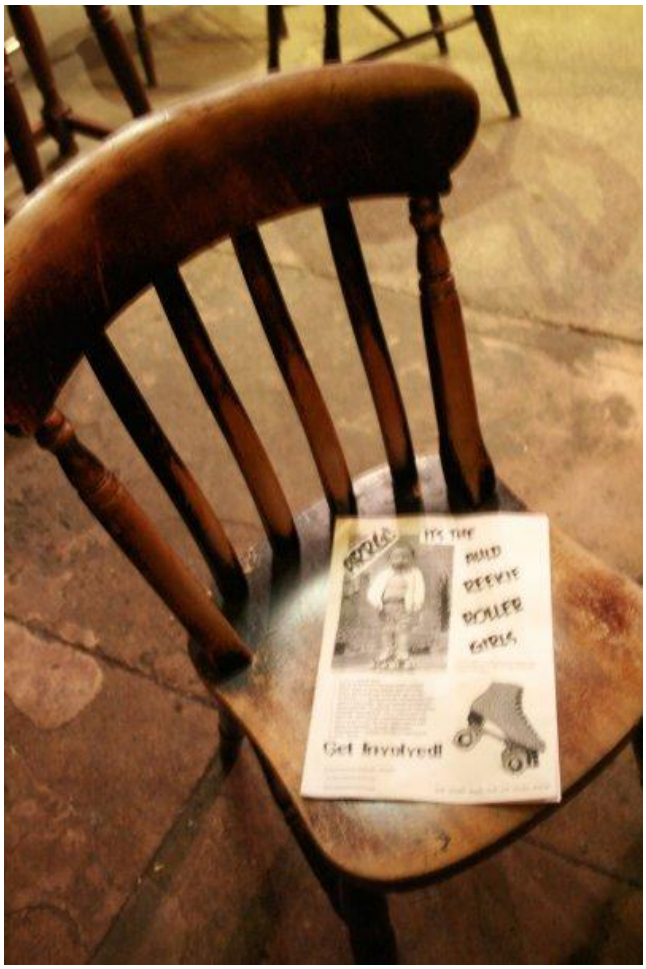

FIGURE 1.2 'GET INVOLVED' FLYER, 2008.

FIGURE 1.3 ANGIE BROUGHT HER SKATES TO A MEETING, 2008. COURTESY OF ARRG.

About twenty women showed up to the first practice, some with skates, some without. Hardly anyone had the necessary protective gear. I bought sticky-name labels and coloured pens, everyone had a sticker with their name, or their freshly-minted derby name, scrawled on it. Beryl bought a CD player and we listened to music as we skated around, lending each other our new skates and taking turns to hold hands or offer forearms and shoulders as much-needed crutches. Towards the end of the two hours we found some foam balls and played a makeshift game of 'netball', with two teams trying to get the ball in the big plastic rubbish bin at the end of the hall.

Over the coming months I spent most evenings sat at my computer, typing out 'up-dates' to track our progress, organizing meetings and trying to keep everyone informed about shifting practice times, what we were doing and how people could get involved. About eight of us travelled to Birmingham to watch a bout between GRG and Birmingham Blitz Derby Dames (BBDD); we screamed ourselves hoarse supporting Glasgow among the sparse audience, got wasted at the after party and talked incessantly to anyone who would listen about how we were starting our own league too.

Back in Edinburgh and a few weeks later, I can remember going to the pub after practice, still sweaty and with helmet hair, still wearing knee-high socks and with our helmets and skates clattering together hanging off our back-packs. I could feel other drinkers looking at us as we sat and laughed, ostensibly oblivious to all around us, but also reveling in the sideways glances, the simultaneous caring and not caring about how ridiculous or self-absorbed we must have looked. I remember the men I worked with behind the bar scoffing at this new thing we were doing and that we couldn't stop talking so excitedly about, they were gently skeptical but I fancied I saw real apprehension in their faces too.

I'd always fantasized about being in a girl-band and envied the men I knew who played guitar, bass and drums to crowded back rooms, for what seemed like a special sense of camaraderie that came from shared creative activity, and from performing together. I felt jealous of their occupation of the stage, and I think I was envious of their position as cultural producers, however small and local; they got to create,

perform and have people come and watch. I'd been tired of being in the audience since I was a teenager, but lack of any real motivation or musical talent combined in not doing anything about it. Starting a roller derby league seemed to offer the same opportunities to take part in a collaborative project, a chance to make something, create something new, that was *ours*, and a chance to perform in front of a crowd.

I fell in love with roller derby as a women-led, DIY, new and emergent sport. I was 23 when we started the league, and it was my first real experience of collective self-organization. I was completely hooked. I decided to stay in Edinburgh and concentrate all my energies on getting the league up and running and keeping it going. I worked two minimum wage jobs for a year to fund my growing derby habit. During and after these first months of the league I would wax lyrical with other skaters about how good it was to learn a new physical skill as an adult, to encounter something difficult, seemingly impossible almost, like roller skating, and then to incrementally build up your skills in an environment where, for some of us, it really did feel like it didn't matter how good you were or what you looked like. I spent hour upon hour at practice falling over, getting back up and falling over again until eventually I could stand and put one foot in front of the other.

We eulogized too about how roller derby, our league, was a space where women could learn to be unselfconscious about their bodies, where it avowedly didn't matter how fat or thin you were, what mattered was learning to skate. I was excited to be creating an environment where our bodies were tools that we did things with, rather than objects to be looked at, or sources of pleasure for other people. It felt like in roller derby we had found a place, or made a space, where women could be strong, powerful, aggressive and assertive, and it was more or less a safe space in which we could do all those things. I enjoyed making up a new name for myself, Daisy Disease, although always slightly embarrassed at what I thought was my rather naff name. It was fun to call ourselves by these new monikers; Zombie Killer, Sweet & Tender Hooligan, Mad Mim, Floss Daily, Chrystal Pistol, Danger Mouth, Busty Malone, Scarface Betty. While a handful of men did join our league, as referees and first aiders, roller derby felt like a way to spend time with a big group of women, working together, understanding each other and building friendships.

I relished wearing short shorts, and feeling more comfortable in my own skin; thinking about how to stay standing, how to propel yourself forward, turn and come to a stop, for me, meant that I stopped thinking about the fatness of my thighs and the hairiness of my armpits. Eventually I stopped thinking about the fatness of my thighs and the hairiness of my armpits even when I wasn't on skates. I stocked up on fishnet tights and eventually would walk to the bus stop in full derby mode, aware but not caring what other people might think, although perhaps secretly hoping that they might look at me and wonder what I was up to, or think, like I did the first time I encountered women playing roller derby, 'wow I want to be like her'. I thought we were doing something new, something different and something special.

As definitions of roller derby shift between 'like a sport for women who don't like sport' and 'a sport for people who really, really like sport' it became clear that defining roller derby is a task that participants negotiate among themselves; the definition of roller derby is subject to contestation.

The Research

It was these characteristics, in combination, that led to my dedicating, one way or another, almost six years of my twenties to the league and to roller derby more broadly. I played roller derby for three years until repetitive knee injuries led me to hang up my skates, and continued my involvement in the league in an organizational capacity for a further 12 months after this. It was also these features of roller derby, as an emergent, women-led, DIY sport, that, late in 2008, inspired my writing of a research proposal seeking funding for an MSc and PhD.

The idea of doing research with the league crystalized one night in the summer of 2008 in yet another bar after practice. We were already in the habit of relating every possible topic back to roller derby, and during a 'what are we doing with our lives?' conversation, Busty Malone loudly exclaimed – 'you should do a PhD on roller derby!' I'd already used my undergraduate sociology degree to specialize in gender sociology, and I was fascinated and confused, as much as I was in love with, the seeming paradoxes that inhered in our roller derby practice; an 'empowering' sport where nearly everyone wore fishnet tights? A full-contact, aggressively physical

sport where visible displays of what is interpreted as normative or emphasized femininity were rife? Calling ourselves by made-up names in the same breath as talking about 'finding ourselves'? A self-organized women's sport in a context where sport itself is widely recognized to be an arena of gendered contestation? An 'inclusive' sport where almost everyone was white, middle class and cis-gender?

It was these characteristics that provided the impetus for embarking upon the research and the development of an 'insider' ethnography based on five years of involvement with the league. Over the course of the project it became clear however that the research would need to adapt alongside changes taking place in the league and roller derby more broadly, just as Aladdin wondered in 2011, 'what do you think your PhD will be about now that derby's so different to when you started?' Writing this introduction in 2013 several key shifts have taken place that cannot be ignored. Firstly, in terms of numbers, in 2008 there were a mere four other leagues in the UK, now there are over 90. During the first months of the league our numbers fluctuated between four and 40 skaters turning up to practice; in 2013 the league had close to 100 registered members. Men increasingly play roller derby, and in 2013 there are over 25 active men's leagues in the UK.

Roller derby is increasingly international. In 2013 the London Roller Girls (LRG), undoubtedly the strongest league outside of North America, were the first European Team to compete at the annual WFTDA Championships. The Edinburgh league's 'A' Team travelled to Stuttgart in the summer of 2010 to compete internationally for the first time, and since then have hosted bouts against leagues from Berlin, Montreal, Paris, Stockholm and Helsinki, as well as travelling to London and Berlin to compete in European tournaments. The first ever roller derby World Cup was hosted by Toronto Roller Derby in December 2011, at which 13 countries were represented; Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, England, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland, Sweden and the USA. In July 2013 the Edinburgh league's 'A' team traveled to Philadelphia to compete in the USA for the first time.

Roller derby and the league are changing. In conversation with Lady Garden in March 2011 we talk about the 'politics' of roller derby, Lady Garden says; 'I would

say that there's definitely an element of gender politics there', and I respond 'but that's not why we started the league'. Lady Garden asks me in return 'why did you start the league then?' and I answer without really thinking; 'because we thought it would be really fun' (individual interview, March 2011). If we started the league 'because we thought it would be really fun', then questions soon arose as to how to keep the league going, how to organize it; how to delineate membership, make decisions, allocate roles and responsibilities, establish shared values and goals and put them in to practice. Organizational structures and policies proliferated.

The popularity of fishnet tights is in steady, if not complete or terminal, decline. In 2011 I watched the World Cup bouts online, as they were live-streamed by the volunteers at Derby News Network. At the same time I talk on Skype with CeeCee, a skater from Virginia who trained with our league while she was studying in Edinburgh, and is now living back in the States. She says admiringly, 'there's been no tutu skirts, you know its being played like a sport' and is pleased to see skaters' 'athletic ability' being showcased, suggesting that this will lead to 'positive media attention'. CeeCee notes how there was only one skater wearing face-paint, and is 'surprised it is even allowed', and comments on how all skaters seem to be showing 'a preference for leggings' rather than fishnets, saying 'they look clean-cut if you know what I mean, there's nothing showy'. CeeCee elaborates:

> In some ways it makes me sad... you know it is, was, still is a sport for people who weren't athletes… but I guarantee you at the World Cup there aren't any skaters over the age of 35, or that have kids, at least little kids, because skating at that level is a daily commitment… I am excited to see it becoming a professional thing, you know a real thing, that's what I always wanted derby to be, I don't want it to be a joke, some people all they see bunch of women in tights running around hitting each other like "aw look at the cute girls out hitting each other" and that's degrading, it's patronizing… and I mean it is special, it is different I don't want it to be ordinary, but I don't want it to be professional wrestling, but I don't want it to be a job either, like maybe if you say that you do derby then people go "sweet, it's really hard" and they know the names of skaters just like they know the names of football players… I don't think skaters should get paid, but we shouldn't have to pay to do it either… (field-notes, December 2011)

As the research progressed, and as roller derby grew in popularity and the membership of the league swelled, it became increasingly evident that many participants were occupied with establishing a consensus that roller derby was *a real, serious sport*.

Aladdin's assertion that roller derby is, unequivocally, for 'people who really, really like sport' might initially lead us to believe that the question of an ambivalent relation to 'sport' in general was settled. On the contrary, the contested use of this phrase continued over the course of the research. For instance another skater, Orville, described roller derby as 'like a sport for women who don't like sport' in an interview for a television feature on a local news channel, broadcast in February 2012. Although at a team meeting just a few days later, where we watched back over the programme, she retracted her description, 'I shouldn't have said that bit about it being a sport for people who don't like sport' (field-notes, February 2012). For the most part the features of the league and of roller derby that I fell in love with and that inspired the research are still there; the league is still run not-for-profit, 'democratically' by and for the women who skate. However, such features increasingly sit somewhat uneasily alongside the growing ubiquity of participants' concerns with *getting taken seriously*.

So this thesis takes it title from how, despite continued ambivalences, a rough consensus emerges among skaters that roller derby simply and self evidently is, and should be understood as, a real, serious sport. At the same time participants perceive that a significant number of others, sleazy men in bars, curious family and friends and cynical academics as well as those working in local journalism and other forms of media production, continue to think of roller derby, in the words of one participant, Tiny Chancer, as 'just a big sexy joke' (field-notes July 2011).

Developing a definition of what roller derby *is* is implicated in roller derby's being-and-becoming a real, serious sport, and is subject to struggle within the league as well as in interactions with those outside of it. Defining roller derby is refracted through its history as a sensationally contrived spectacle, and takes place in a landscape where women's sport more broadly is the site of gender contestation, and more specifically, is subject to dismissal as an inferior or novelty version of the 'real'

men's game. Skaters have a problem with roller derby's being taken seriously. The thesis thus responds to a broad question, 'how is getting taken seriously negotiated in practice?'

Seriousness

Participants respond, in their reflexive self-organization and self-representation, to the question of how to achieve serious recognition, and thus grapple with how to put seriousness in to practice. As concerns with *getting taken seriously* came to infuse the league, seriousness grew as a research focus.

'Seriousness' is a resolutely everyday word, the meaning of which can appear obvious and anodyne; we think we know what it means. Rhetorical requests to 'take X seriously' abound, especially in the institutional world of the university. Claims to be taking X seriously, the need to 'be serious about Y', or complaints that 'Z is not taken seriously' occur with monotonous regularity in staff meetings, conference presentations, lectures, tutorials, union meetings and informal conversations alike. The rhetorical mobilization of 'seriousness' is rarely subject to questioning, while common to hear argument that 'yes indeed we do take Z very seriously', the meaning of seriousness, and of taking seriously, is often left implicit; the details of *how* to be serious, or to take something – a proposition, an issue, others, oneself – seriously are rarely explicitly articulated.

'Seriousness', by virtue of its semantic ambivalence (Bauman 1993), thus appears to connote a diffuse or even empty referent, as I suggest is the case in Stebbins' (1982, 1992, 2007, 2011) use of the concept in the 'Serious Leisure Perspective' (Breeze, 2013b). At the same time, 'seriousness' has something of a normative character, as Bakhtin (1984), de Beauvoir (1948), Halberstam (2011) and Sartre (1957) all suggest. Asking others to 'be serious' or 'take you seriously' is an appeal for the recognition of one's own terms, one's own definition (Viveiros de Castro, 2011); seriousness matters because it is a question of who we are in relation to others (Candea, 2011: 148). In practice, seriousness is always open to multiple interpretations; *of course we are being serious/taking it seriously otherwise we wouldn't be in this meeting, at this conference, having this discussion in the first*

place. Serious rhetoric is about power and establishing distinctions, legitimacy, authority and hierarchies of value (ibid) and the normative and multiple character of 'seriousness' is enabled by both its semantic ambivalence and the assumption that its meaning is 'obvious'.

Participants frequently encounter interlocutors who do not recognize roller derby as a sport, who do not take it seriously. Participants thus negotiate the meaning of 'seriousness' and of *getting taken seriously* in their everyday roller derby practice in a variety of ways. As participants in an only recently emergent, women-led, self-organized, full-contact sport played on roller skates with no professional form (even before we get to the issues of evidently fabricated names, fishnets and 'tutus') roller derby skaters occupy something of a position of gendered alterity relative to a broader cultural field of sport (Bourdieu, 1988, 1991, 1993), by virtue of the gender and organizational characteristics of roller derby itself in interaction with those of a broader field.

The research did not begin with a definition of seriousness, but rather set out to explore its meaning in practice. 'Seriousness' and 'getting taken seriously' are terms drawn from participants' everyday language that I develop and put to use, in ways that are not entirely commensurate with their quotidian forms, but that retain the advantage of being relatively less abstracted from the vocabularies of the people I research with than more established sociological alternatives. Seriousness has not yet been subject to sustained sociological inquiry. While closely related to familiar concepts such as legitimacy, authority and symbolic capital, as well as to perennial concerns with, for example, social interaction and structure/agency, seriousness itself is a novel lens, synthesizing and thus troubling and elaborating upon these familiar sociological preoccupations. Similarly, while 'seriousness' is approached directly and variously in French existentialist philosophy (de Beauvoir, 1948; Sartre, 1957), Russian literary theory (Bakhtin, 1984), anthropological theory (Candea, 2011; Viveiros de Castro, 2011) and leisure studies (Stebbins, 1982, 1992, 2007, 2011) there is very little existing research orientated to empirical accounts of seriousness in practice (Breeze 2013b).

It is my hope that after encountering this research, readers' ears will prick-up whenever hearing appeals to or for seriousness; what is at stake? In whose interests is seriousness being put to work? What is being made visible and what is being erased? I think we need to re-think seriousness and be alert to its overt and tacit implications; what does it mean to take seriously, to be taken seriously? Or conversely to *not* take seriously, or be taken seriously. This is one very broad set of aims that orientate the research.

Aims, Questions & Overview

The thesis thus became about giving an account of practices of seriousness. The task was threefold. Firstly to contextualize how and why an interest in getting taken seriously came about in the league (Chapter 2 and 4). Secondly to give an account of the most striking changes that took place in the league between 2008 and 2012 (Chapters 4 and 5). Thirdly, to make analytical connections between this one, specific context and familiar preoccupations in the sociology of sport as well as sociology more broadly; with gender subversion/conformity (Chapters 4 and 6), bureaucratization and organizational change (Chapter 5), gendered presentations of self (Chapter 6) and theories of voluntarism and constraint in human interaction (Chapters 6 and 7). In general terms my central contention is that an analytical focus on seriousness is an original and very appropriate way to extend our understandings of such well-established sociological themes in the novel empirical context of roller derby.

Analyzing seriousness in practice, and producing a sociological account of seriousness, facilitated three further research aims:

1. To elaborate upon and trouble existing accounts of gender subversion/conformity, for instance, research with women's sport, and in particular to upset understandings of subversion/conformity as binary opposites.
2. To question narratives of the inevitability of, for instance, bureaucratization and professionalization in research with 'alternative' sports.
3. To understand how participants negotiate the familiar dilemmas of struggling for position in a broader field, often understood in terms of 'co-optation' or 'incorporation' if not 'mainstreaming'.

The research aims were incubated as much in my own immersive participation in the research context as in relation to existing literature and overarching sociological themes. There is thus a significant methodological component to the thesis, through which I aim to experiment with methodological allegory (Law, 2004), in order to unsettle heroic accounts of 'insider' research as well as methodologies that posit a necessary distance between researcher and research (Chapter 3, interludes). In producing this research account I seek to enact what I think are the self-conscious ambivalences of roller derby, in an unwillingness to take the research, and myself, entirely seriously, whilst at the same seeking serious recognition and hoping to be intelligible as a 'serious' piece of sociological research.

These broader aims gave rise to, and were pursued via, a complimentary set of precisely focused research questions:

1. How is seriousness, getting taken seriously, negotiated in practice?
    a. How does getting taken seriously relate to gender subversion/conformity?
    b. How does getting taken seriously relate to organizational change?

As participants worked to diminish distinctions between roller derby and 'sport', they enacted a set of related distinctions between; what the league *used to be like* and what it *became; who* roller derby is and is not *by and for;* and practices that are and are not conducive to serious recognition. As participants' definitions of roller derby move away from 'a sport for women who don't like sport' towards 'a sport for people who really, really like sport' a second research question arose:

2. In pursuit of serious recognition does the league become what it was initially defined in opposition to?
    a. How do participants make distinctions and move between what is, and is conducive to serious recognition?
    b. How do participants continue to *make* their league, roller derby and sport more broadly, just as in turn their league and roller derby become established as institutions and, alongside 'sport', inform the possibilities and limits of their action?

Thinking about getting taken seriously in roller derby in terms of the league becoming what it was once initially defined in opposition to, is of course, something

of a set up and such a formulation is readily amenable to problematization. In getting taken seriously, participants bump up against a false choice, between remaining in obscurity and erasing oneself in the process of achieving serious recognition.

Perhaps unsurprisingly I want to pursue a third option, or more accurately, a middle ground between the two. Concentrating on moments when participants' claims for serious recognition refuse and rework the gendered terms of such intelligibility, I argue that participants' enactments of what I posit as *non-/seriousness* enable skaters to create new organizational and representational praxis, identities, meanings and relations, as they negotiate the possibilities and limits of working together to make something relatively new. Non-/seriousness is how participants move between roller derby, sport and gender as inevitable, singular, certain and beyond their influence and yet malleable, contingent, multiple, ambivalent and created in their own actions.

Non-/seriousness is thus a way to refute and rework the terms of recognition, a way to pursue serious recognition without the league necessarily or entirely becoming what it was initially defined in opposition to, a way for participants to continue to make their own organizations and representations, even as such manifestations of their own agency solidify and inform the possibilities of their future action. An analysis of seriousness in practice is central to understanding mid-ranges of agency, and mid-levels of organizational change. Participants' movements back and forth between taking, and not taking, seriously enables such change to take place; non-/seriousness is a resource.

The following chapters work together in pursuit of these broad aims and in response to these specific questions. In Chapter 2, 'kinda subversive, kinda hegemonic', I situate roller derby in relation to existing bodies of work on; gender and sport; 'alternative' sports and a Bourdieusian 'field' of sport; and theories of structure and agency. My contention is that while such precedents do a thorough job of contextualizing *why* getting taken seriously is an issue for participants there is something of a gap in the literature when it comes to a sociology of seriousness itself. Seriousness sits at the intersection of, and synthesizes, established sociological concerns with women's sport and professionalization. Crucially, an empirical focus

on seriousness enables the foregrounding of a thorough ambivalence that runs through, but is never fully realized in, existing research.

Chapter 3 discusses method and methodology. Over the course of five years involvement with Edinburgh's roller derby league I used a continuum of ethnographic methods to generate data in 18 months of participant observation, 26 in-depth interviews, a collaborative film-making project and from my own personal participation at the very beginning of the league[2]. Research methods were subject to reconfiguration as getting taken seriously came to be more of a concern in the league and as the research unfolded. Not only were such methods exceedingly appropriate to generating empirical material in response to the research questions, but the shifting character of my own 'insider' status necessitated, and was a resource for, broader epistemological reflection.

The thesis thus includes four interludes, which take place between Chapters 4 through 7. These interludes experiment with methodological allegory (Law, 2004) in order to interrupt and expand upon the thesis' central analytical contentions. The interludes combine discussions of 'insider' research, emotions in research process and product and research methods as techniques of seriousness. As experiments in allegory, the interludes articulate a commitment to subjecting 'research' to the same critical and analytical scrutiny as 'roller derby'. Tracing the connections between getting taken seriously in roller derby and the blurring of leisure and work in 'insider' research, in the interludes I tell stories about seriousness through stories about doing research. The interludes thus ask and respond to two questions: *What is the relationship between seriousness and research? Is non-/serious research possible?*

Chapter 4, 'how weird it was back in the day', is the first fully empirical chapter, in which I integrate a discussion of the league's beginnings in 2008-2009, in relation to 'sport' in general, participants' production of gendered self-representations and the

[2] A full list of participants is given in appendix ii.

early character of the league's DIY organization, with participants' re-interpretations, in 2010-2013, of their previous understandings of their league and themselves. As fishnet tights and a critical or oppositional relation to other forms of sport were relegated to the past, and as men played roller derby in increasing numbers, participants struggled to hold on to a sense of roller derby's uniqueness as a specifically *women's* sport. Initial organization was reinterpreted as both endearingly and idyllically shambolic, and as unfair and inefficient. As getting taken seriously infuses participants' daily roller derby practices, the decision is made to *be competitive,* to try and win games.

In Chapter 5 I focus on the institution of competition in participants' self-organization, particularly the definition and administration of *membership.* In pursuit of fairness and efficiency, league organization was formalized into a 'committee structure' and policies proliferated. Participants devised increasingly fine, bureaucratically administered distinctions between skaters, and in an unprecedented move the league was divided into separate provisions for 'competitive' and 'recreational' skaters. The league continued to be run 'by the skaters, for the skaters', but the *meaning* of skaters becomes ever more defined, and bureaucratically specified. The organizational structures that skaters work together to create, in turn solidify, and come to delineate the possibilities and limits of their future action.

Initially it seems that pursuing serious recognition perhaps necessitated an abandonment of the forms of gender engagement so central to previous research accounts of roller derby. However, in Chapter 6 I argue that just as *getting taken seriously* comes to dominate, it is precisely when participants refuse to take themselves seriously that new identifications, as (not serious) rollergirls as well as (serious) 'athletes', are enabled. I foreground an analysis of the moments when participants' refuse to make derby entirely recognizable as 'serious sport' in order to suggest that rather than simply reconfigure roller derby in pursuit of serious recognition, participants continue to engage with the gendered terrain of a broader field of sport in surprising ways. It is through practices of non-/seriousness that participants struggle for position in a broader field at the same time as negating the gendered terms of serious recognition.

Chapter 7 continues this analysis, with a focus on the 'made-up' and the 'make-believe' in participants' practice. I characterize narratives of roller derby as different or separate from notions of 'real life', derby names, and participants' production of non-human self-representations as practices of *fantasy, parody* and *irony* respectively and suggest that through such practices that participants intervene in relations between what they 'say' and what they *mean*. It is in the 'made-up', and particularly in the 'make-believe' that participants negotiate and make sense of both the changes that have taken place in their league over the past five years, and continue to engage with the idea that their league, and roller derby more broadly, are manifestations of their own deliberate, reflexive collective action. In *parody* and *irony* especially, participants make a way through the apparent contradictions of being constrained by unanticipated consequences of their own agency.

The thesis concludes, firstly by recapitulating the core arguments and implications of each chapter, and discussing the overall empirical, theoretical and methodological contributions of the research as a whole, before raising further questions for future work. The central contention is that analysis of seriousness in roller derby both elaborates and disrupts existing understandings of familiar phenomena, and specifically that *non-/seriousness* is a particularly fruitful addition to the conceptual toolboxes of those seeking to understand mid-ranges of structure/agency.

Sports, as various as boxing (Wacquant, 2004), cricket (James, 1963) and 'e-sports' computer gaming (Taylor, 2012), have been fertile grounds for ethnographic monographs elucidating the nuances of the interconnections between masculinity, race and class in relation to broader economic, cultural and historical forces and flows; gender studies is an established field of inquiry in such contexts. Enthusiasts claim that roller derby is 'the fastest growing sport on the planet', yet it has only received limited sociological attention, all of which is thus far concerned with the occasion for gender subversion/conformity located in participants' practices of dress in combination with their participation in a demanding, self-organized and women-

led full contact sport. Relatedly, but also by contrast, I prioritize an exploration of how roller derby is a sport that is ambivalent about sport. Roller derby is a question of how to put seriousness into practice, how to pursue and achieve serious recognition. The league is an organization, and roller derby is a cultural form that is self-consciously a product of participants' collaborative action. These issues are elaborated upon in relation to existing bodies of literature in the following chapter, *Kinda Subversive, Kinda Hegemonic? Situating Seriousness in an Emergent, DIY Women's Sport*.

2. ‘Kinda Subversive, Kinda Hegemonic’? Situating Seriousness in an Emergent, DIY, Women’s Sport

Contemporary roller derby is unlike any other sports practice (Murray, 2012: 66) by virtue of its initial development outside of existing sports institutions, a DIY organizational ethos, and status as a women’s sport *sui generis*. The league thus presents a singular research opportunity compared to other forms of specifically women’s sport that emerge as versions of what is otherwise a ‘men’s game’. Sporting legitimacy is on the agenda in this context as participants are increasingly occupied with getting taken seriously.

However, roller derby has only received limited sociological attention, which prioritizes questions of gender subversion and/or conformity (Carlson, 2010; 2011; Cohen, 2008; Finley, 2010; Hern, 2010; Murray, 2012). To document how skaters’ sports practice challenges a normative, binary gender order and/or reinforces such a regime is to repeat established patterns in the sociology of sport and gender sociology more broadly (Breeze, 2010). Despite variation, such approaches can be summarized by Sedgwick’s synopsis of the conclusions of much cultural criticism; roller derby is ‘kinda subversive, kinda hegemonic’ (Sedgwick, 1993: 15) when it comes to gender. Sedgwick diagnoses the commonality of such conclusions, suggesting that theoretical recourse to ‘the hegemonic and the subversive’ suffers from a ‘gradual evacuation of substance’ in which ‘hegemonic’ comes to mean ‘everything that is’ while ‘the subversive’ is posited in a ‘purely negative relation’ (2003: 12). I thus take Sedgwick’s oft-quoted phrase and use it as a device throughout the chapter, shorthand for the conclusions of much research on sport and gender. Ambivalences akin to ‘kinda subversive, kinda hegemonic’ run through the works discussed below. My aim however is to take such precedents as a starting point from which to explore seriousness in women’s roller derby; to begin where previous research leaves off.

The following literature review thus anticipates the analytical task of the thesis as a whole. As social theory increasingly prioritizes ‘the excluded middle’ (Bauman, 1993: 9) and the ‘middle ranges of agency’ (Sedgwick, 2003: 13) there is a need for

empirical research that centers the practical passage in-between extremes of voluntarism and determinism, or between 'what we make with our own hands and what exists outside our hands' (Latour, 2010: 29). My contention is that an analytical focus on seriousness is a productive contribution to such theoretical conversations.

To these ends the chapter reviews relevant bodies of literature and suggests that while empirical questions of seriousness sit at the intersection of a range of familiar sociological concerns, 'seriousness' itself represents something of a gap in sociological knowledge. I thus present focused discussions of; (1) gender and sport, (2) the composition of a broader cultural field of sport, and (3) theorizing structure and agency. I argue that while such precedents are extremely useful for contextualizing *why* getting taken seriously has come to be an issue in an emergent, DIY women's sport, there is little sociological research on *how* seriousness is negotiated in practice. In the final section of the chapter I consider the limitations of previous conceptualizations of seriousness and demonstrate how the themes that emerge from this review, in combination, provide both context and impetus for seriousness as an appropriate focus of enquiry.

2.1 Gender & Sport

Sport is widely recognized as 'one of the cultural practices most significant in the construction of gender' (Theberge, 1993: 301). Sport, where 'natural' capacity is repeatedly delineated, expanded and augmented (Cavanagh & Sykes, 2006: 790), is a key site for the naturalization, contestation and reconfiguration of gender (Grindstaff & West, 2006: 515). Sport can highlight 'the contingency, however constrained, of even the most entrenched ways of thinking about bodies' (Throsby, 2013: 5). The ways that different forms of sport are practiced, organized, mediated and consumed can both challenge and sustain systematic inequality between women and men (Bernstein, 2002; Biscomb & Griggs, 2012; Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004; Cooky et al., 2013; Deem, 1987) *and* discourses of innate or binary gender difference (Birrell & Cole, 1994; Bridel & Rail, 2007; Bryson, 1990; Chase, 2006; Connell, 1990; Cox & Thompson, 2000; Disch & Kane, 1996; Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Esks et al., 1998; Grindstaff & West, 2010; Hall 1984; Harris & Clayton, 2007; Hargreaves, 1986, 1997; Hargreaves & Vertinsky, 2007; Kimmel, 1990; Light &

Kirk, 2000; McKay et al., 2000; Messner, 1988, 1990, 1992, 2002; Roussel et al., 2010; Scraton et al., 2005; Shakib & Dunbar, 2002; Theberge, 1997, 1998, 2000; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998; Whitson 1990; Yochim, 2010; Young 2005, 2010).

Histories of the exclusion, marginalization and continued trivialization of women's sport (O'Reilly & Cahn, 2007) and, conversely, celebrations of women in sport as 'cultural icons' (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003) contextualize participants' concerns with getting taken seriously. Existing roller derby research centers femininity and points to something of a double-bind, where skaters' enactments of emphasized or normative femininity at once sustain *and* de-naturalize discourses of essential binary gender difference, and crucially, both legitimate *and* undermine women's sports participation. Existing work on sport and gender is shot though with a thorough ambivalence, which some instances of broader gender theory work, I suggest problematically, to foreclose. It thus becomes appropriate to explore how practices of seriousness in roller derby relate to occasions for gender subversion/conformity as previously identified in women's sport, in particular through changes in participants' self-representations.

Roller Derby & Femininity

Roller derby has been interpreted as a 'site for the construction of alternative femininities' (Finley, 2010: 359), as encouraging 'gender performance' that challenges 'oppressive gender ideologies' (Hern, 2010: 61), as 'a rich, adventurous space to satirize athletic and feminine norms' (Carlson, 2010: 428), and as including 'a discourse of "empowerment" that urges women to overcome limits and reinvent gendered subjectivity' (Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2013: 673) and to 'challenge hetero-normative gender roles' (Pavlidis, 2012: 173). Murray focuses on spectatorship and concludes that 'the way roller derby is interpreted both does and does not challenge the institution of heterosexuality' (2012; 246). Femininity is variously operationalized in existing research; Murray (ibid) uses 'non-virtuous' femininity; Finley (2010) focuses on 'pariah', 'hegemonic' and 'alternative' femininities (see Holland, 2004), and Carlson (2010) develops the 'female significant' from Connell's (1987) concept of 'emphasized femininity'.

Unsurprisingly, derby names and practices of dress, notably the purported ubiquity of fishnet tights, hot-pants and short skirts, alongside tattoos, piercings and make-up, are central to existing analyses. Carlson is indicative; 'showcasing skaters' menacing names, skater uniforms usually include short skirts, ripped fishnets and exposed panties' (2011: 86). These interpretations turn on spectacular combinations of various forms of femininity (located in e.g. fishnet tights) and masculinity (located in e.g. full-contact sport) in roller derby practice, and on the well-documented ideological incompatibility of femininity and sport (Kimmel, 2000; Messner, 1988). For instance, Finley's article opens with the following description:

> Her hair is in child-like pigtails, her tattoos glare through strategically placed holes in fishnet stockings, and a short skirt reveals the pink panties that match the tight T-shirt altered to provide the most potent view of breast cleavage. The image portrays the outlandish, extravagant conventions of sexuality associated with the tawdriness of "pin-up girls." And yet the salience of knee pads, shin pads, elbow pads, and helmets resist simple assessments of sexualized femininity, as do facial scowls and the brutish postures through which she powers her way around the skating rink. (2010: 359-360)

Such combinations of 'femininity' and 'sport' are what lead Carlson to argue that skaters 'expose the contingency of emphasized femininity as a coherent system of gender norms' (2010: 438) in the development of a persona that 'splices aggression, sexual assertiveness, and femininity' (ibid: 432). For Carlson, skaters 'call attention to the constructed nature of gender' through 'a new name and costume-like feminine-punk clothing' (ibid). Carlson draws on early subcultural studies, Hebdige (1979) in particular, to suggest that derby skaters 'engage norms [of femininity] to indicate their flimsiness' (Carlson, 2010: 430) in specific practices of dress. At the same time, these same practices are implicated in maintaining gender 'hegemony' (Finley, 2010: 382). For instance, as interrogating 'emphasized femininity without necessarily undermining the masculine/feminine gender binary' (Carlson, 2010: 428), re-inscribing gender norms (Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2013: 685), being limited by a lack of interrogation of class and race based inequality (Carlson, 2010: 437), and confirming, rather than undermining, femininity (Carlson, 2011: 86).

Overall then, existing analyses of roller derby have posited it as *kinda subversive, kinda hegemonic*; another example of sport where 'boundaries of gender difference are crossed as well as preserved' (Grindstaff & West, 2006: 515). Finley frames the situation as one in which 'gender maneuvering… is full of contradictions that cannot be oversimplified; there are elements that are resistive and parts that are not.' (2010: 383) and Pavlidis points to 'tensions between creativity and constraint' (2012: 165). Carlson addresses these theoretical impasses head-on, asking 'what is feminine about femininity? …its contours are conveniently fluid; its content is imperviously amorphous; its relationship to an always-persuasive masculinity is its only apparent faithfulness' (2011: 77).

In her later article Carlson describes the 'gendered manner in which subjects relate to gender norms' (2011: 79) and bases her argument on the way that 'female athletes splice masculine (i.e. sports participation) and feminine (e.g. wearing make-up) practices with an increasing capacity to maintain themselves as feminine' (ibid: 80). The point is that such 'splicing', rather than undermining femininity, 'is constitutive of femininity… femininity necessarily engages norms as well as social spheres marked by masculinity' (ibid). In short Carlson suggests that 'successful femininity' involves performances of masculinity. I mention this previous research with roller derby in such detail here because I want to suggest that the tensions it so thoroughly traces between gender subversion/conformity are indicative of a pervasive ambivalence, both in what roller derby is and in its gendered relation to a broader field of sport.

Existing work foregrounds relations between femininity and sport, but does not consider shifts in roller derby's *gendered relation* to a broader field of sport. While it certainly remains possible to emphasize roller derby's sporting uniqueness, my research participants increasingly assert roller derby's similarity to other forms of sport. That participants both wear fishnets and disavow their significance, figure 'short skirts, ripped fishnets and exposed panties' as a barrier to serious recognition, and express frustration at the centrality of dress and derby names to academic and popular accounts of roller derby, is returned to throughout the thesis (particularly

Chapters 4 and 6) as I explore how practices of seriousness relate to occasions for gender subversion/conformity previously identified in women's sport.

I now explore these issues in more depth by considering how roller derby takes place in a context where women in sport are subject to exclusion, marginalization and trivialization, contextualizing why subversion/conformity has so overwhelmingly been the focus of existing roller derby research, and moreover further situating why getting taken seriously became an issue in the league.

Women's Sport

In recent years the issue of gender equality in sport has received mass media attention, clustering around events such as the exclusion of women's ski jump from the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics (Suddath, 2010), the introduction of women's boxing to the London 2012 Olympic games (Topping, 2012; Rodrigues, 2012) and the all-male selection panel and shortlist for the 2011 BBC Sports Personality of the Year award (BBC 2011; Lutz, 2011). High-profile controversies have drawn attention to sexism in the production of sports media, for instance Sky Sports presenters Andy Gray and Richard Keys' comments on lineswoman Sian Massey's understanding of the off-side rule (Macaskill, 2011), and the way that trans* and intersex athletes are erased as international sports organizations apply disciplinary binary logics of gender, for instance in Caster Semenya's gender verification testing (Hanlon, 2009).

Gender research has often focused on women engaged in social action otherwise imagined to be the prerogative of men, as in ethnographies of women in apparently 'masculine' or 'male dominated' cultural practices such as punk music (Leblanc, 1999); car modification (Lumsden, 2010) and bullfighting (Pink, 1997). Sport has been characterised as a 'proving ground for masculinity' that 'can only be preserved as such by the exclusion of women from the activity' (Whitson, 1990: 24). The issue is one of ideologies of incompatibility between women, or femininity, and sport: 'to the extent that one is a woman, one cannot excel at sports; to the extent that one excels at sports, one cannot be a real woman' (Kimmel, 2000: xiii). It is these

dynamics that inform a context in which women's sports participation is viewed as potentially subversive:

> If sport is a cultural space where gender relations... are produced, preserved and publicly celebrated, then women's involvement in sport can be seen as a form of resistance that disturbs the (apparently precarious) logic of male supremacy (Birrell & Theberge, 1994: 343)

Women's sports participation can be understood in terms of a struggle for legitimacy as well as a site of gender contestation, as demonstrated in the wealth of feminist analysis that has emerged since the 1970s (Bartram, 2001; Birrell, 1984; Birrell & Richter, 1987; Bryson, 1990; Hall, 1994; McKay et al., 2000; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Scraton et al., 2005; Varpalotai, 1987). Female athletes have been analyzed as 'contested ideological terrain' (Messner, 1988), described as 'almost an oxymoron' (Kimmel, 2000: xiii) and as the aforementioned feminist cultural icons (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003). Concurrently women's sport has been characterized by marginalization and trivialization (Shakib & Dunbar, 2002: 365; Theberge, 1993: 301; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998: 253). For instance the prohibition of body checking in women's ice hockey (Theberge, 1997: 73) and the heteronormative and supportive functions of cheerleading (Grindstaff & West, 2006: 501) are cited as examples of sports practices that 'support a view of women as fragile and weak' (Theberge, 1997: 69).

Despite a range of significant exceptions such as women's ice hockey in Northern Ontario in the 1920s (Theberge, 2000: 2, see also Hargreaves, 1997: 35) there is a history of women's exclusion from sport, with for example international sporting competitions restricted to men on the basis of ideological arguments about the biological incompatibility of female physiology and physical exertion (Messner, 2002). Despite legislative interventions, such as Title IX in the US in 1972 (O'Reilly & Cahn, 2007) and 'the tremendous increased participation of girls and women in sport at the high school, collegiate, and professional level' (Cooky et al., 2013: 203), women's sport continues, on the whole and despite important exceptions, to be marginalized. Research draws attention to continuing gender disparities, for example

in the under-representation of women in coaching and management positions (Theberge, 1993).

Such dynamics are especially prevalent when it comes to media coverage, which 'conveys a message to audiences that sport continues to be by, for, and about men' (Cooky et al., 2013: 203). For instance Biscomb and Griggs conclude that 'the position of women's cricket is still framed in terms of men's cricket in terms of the quantity of reporting' (2012: 11). These dynamics occur alongside 'the utterly mainstream status' of 'the female athlete' (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003: xv), for instance in the heralding of 'more than 100 female competitors than ever before' (BBC, 2012: n/p) in Team GB for the 2012 Olympics. It is in this context that a research focus on roller derby participants' gendered *self-representations* becomes particularly apt.

This has only been the briefest review of a large and nuanced body of work. My aim is simply to demonstrate that roller derby occurs in an inherited context of women's literal and symbolic exclusion, marginalization and trivialization in sport, and plays out in relation to on-going contestations over the ideological incompatibilities between femininity and sport just as women's participation has vastly increased in recent decades. Women's sport is a struggle for gendered legitimacy. These dynamics contextualize why we might expect that, as women playing an only recently emergent sport that is widely interpreted as involving its own unique opportunities for 'exposing the contingency' of normative femininity in combinations of fishnet tights, hot-pants and full-contact action, participants encounter problems with being taken seriously.

Additionally, sport, especially full-contact sports such as rugby, ice-hockey or American football predominantly played by men, is often interpreted as a social location for the performance and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is an 'ordering version' or 'cultural ideal' of dominant masculinity, 'constructed in relation to subordinated masculinities' as well as to women and 'centered on a single structural fact, the global dominance of men over women' (Connell, 1987: 183-184). Hegemonic masculinity is defined as working to maintain

practices that institutionalize such dominance and subordination (ibid: 185-186) thus sustaining a gender order characterized by inequality.

Various sports practices are interpreted as reproducing hegemonic masculinity in celebrations of dominance, aggression, and 'giving your all' (Light & Kirk, 2001: 167); embodied power and efficient, rational or instrumental use of the body (ibid: 171); strength and legitimized violence (Harris & Clayton, 2007: 153); competition and athleticism (Grindstaff & West, 2006: 506) and heterosexuality (ibid: 511). For instance, Shakib & Dunbar conclude that sport supports 'the larger gender order through the maintenance of the masculine sport hegemony' (2002: 371). Hegemonic masculinity, and its counterpart, emphasized femininity (Connell 1987) are central concepts to much work on gender subversion/conformity in sport.

Subversion & Conformity

When sport is positioned as an arena of hegemonic masculinity, women's sports participation (Shakib & Dunbar, 2002: 370; Theberge, 1997: 70; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998: 259, 266), LGBT sports teams (McDonald, 2008; Price & Parker, 2003; Travers, 2006), queer athletes (Broad, 2001; Cahn, 1993; Griffin, 1998; McDonald, 2008) and women-only sports contexts (Beaver, 2012; Birrell & Richter 1987; Varpalotai, 1987) are interpreted as de-naturalizing associations between hegemonic masculinity, men and sporting success. At the same time however, women's 'uncritical adoption' (Theberge, 1997: 84) of hegemonic masculinity, for example in 'toughness in the face of physical violence' (ibid), is interpreted as defusing the subversive potential of women's success in traditionally 'male' sports. For instance, in the conclusion that women's enactment of dominance and aggression in sport ultimately 'reinforces' hegemonic masculinity rather than, or as well as, challenging 'enduring patriarchal ideologies that equate physical power with masculinity' (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998: 269, see also Bryson, 1990: 182; Hargreaves, 1986: 117; Theberge, 1997: 84). Just as researchers increasingly pursue the possibility of 'more progressive forms of hegemonic masculinity' (Grindstaff & West, 2011: 877, see also Anderson, 2011) sportswomen's doings (West & Zimmerman, 1987) of hegemonic masculinity are interpreted as subverting *and* colluding with hegemonic masculinity in sport.

Similarly, ‘feminization’, in for example, modes of dress, is seen to devalue women’s sporting achievements and lessen any potential threat to masculine dominance such achievement poses (Theberge, 1993: 311). Wughalter (1978) and Felshin (1974) developed the idea of a ‘feminine apologetic’ in women’s sport, in which emphasis on conventionally feminine attractiveness is an apologetic attempt to neutralize transgressions into the male domain of sport (Wughalter, 1978: 12) and to ‘overcompensate for their masculine behavior on the field’ (Knight & Giuliano, 2003: 273). So that for instance, Grindstaff & West (2006: 508) note how ‘feminine adornment’ masks, devalues and apologizes for cheerleading women’s athleticism. Conversely, as demonstrated by existing research with roller derby, various forms of femininity are also interpreted as a subversive challenge, both to sport as a masculine domain and to discourses of essential binary genders. Broad (2001) draws on Halberstam’s (1998) work on female masculinity and develops the concept of a feminine *unapologetic*. Broad describes an ‘annual alumni rugby game played in evening gowns, prom dresses, and the occasional wedding dress’ (2001: 190), in which by ‘being strong, athletic women (doing female masculinity) and ‘doing drag’ these players were enacting a gendered transgression of gender’ (ibid).

Others still detail imperatives for sportswomen to present a normative heterosexual image (Cahn, 1993; Griffin, 1998; McDonald, 2008; Washington & Karen, 2001: 198) and demonstrate how emphasis on sportswomen’s (hetero)sexual physical attractiveness detracts from their sporting ability (Shakib & Dunbar, 2002: 371). Blinde & Taub (1992: 522) suggest that this is one way that women’s sports achievement is devalued and that sportswomen are stigmatized. There are on-going tensions between structure and agency here, seen in arguments that while ‘empowering and a form of resistance’ at a ‘personal level’, women’s sport remains ‘framed by the parameters of material and structural influence and constraint’ and the ‘persisting power of patriarchy’ (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998; 270). These dynamics combine in a contemporary context in which much women’s sport, whilst struggling for legitimacy, is often positioned as lesser in comparison to the ‘real’ - men’s – version, and point to how playing sport implies a careful negotiation of its treacherously gendered terrain.

According to the literature reviewed here sport, for many women, involves treading a fine if not impossible line between being masculine 'enough' but not 'too' masculine, being feminine 'enough' and not 'too' feminine. Femininity in sport is a double-edged sword, diminishing the threat women's sports participation poses to entrenched notions of gender difference, and at the same time de-coupling associations between masculinity and sport, and perhaps masculinity and male-ness. Sportswomen's femininity legitimizes their sports participation, when read as sufficiently heteronormative, and delegitimizes the same participation when read as indicative of a vulnerability and incompatibility with sport. I have previously argued that:

> …following precedents set in the somewhat Janus-faced literature leads to a characterisation of roller derby skaters as simultaneously refuting *and* rearticulating essentialist readings of sexed bodies, transgressing *and* reinscribing dominant notions of compliant hetero-sexualised, "emphasised", femininity, as apologising for their athleticism, as performing alterative femininities, and all the while as shoring up the ideologies and institutions of male privilege and hegemonic masculinity through their doing of "hegemonic masculinity" *and* "emphasised femininity…. these theoretical gymnastics create a kind of "damned if you do, damned if you don't" position for sportswomen… (Breeze, 2010: 130)

The claim here is that such a situation is at least as indicative of conceptual confusion as empirical complexity (Breeze 2010). However, I want to revise this position here in favour of the argument that such tensions and multiplicities in the existing literature are a question of *ambivalence* and that the problem lies in attempts to foreclose or resolve such ambiguity.

Ambivalence

When existing literature is considered as a whole women in sport seem to encounter somewhat of a double-double-bind, in which their enactments of various forms of femininity both challenge and sustain a gender order in which women and sport are 'almost an oxymoron' *and* their enactments of various forms of masculinity *and* femininity have the same ambivalent effects. Sociological analyses of women's sport

posit it as *kinda subversive, kinda hegemonic*. I now briefly consider two broader examples that theorize firstly femininity, and secondly gender more broadly, both of which I interpret as working to foreclose ambivalence. I suggest that it is epistemologically preferable in this instance, to work to keep ambivalence open.

Angela McRobbie's (2007, 2009) analysis of girls and young women in politics, work, education, sexuality and consumer culture, and specifically her focus on women's 'access to sexual freedoms previously the preserve of men' (2007: 718), is concerned with questions of gender subversion/conformity, and like much research with women's sport, centers femininity. To simplify, we can say that McRobbie is interested in women doing 'things that men do', and doing so while looking or acting 'like women'. McRobbie proposes that in the 'post feminist masquerade' a 'spectacle of excessive femininity' is 'triumphantly reinstated' and hegemonic masculinity is shored-up, 'by endorsing this public femininity which appears to undermine, or at least unsettle, the new power accruing to women' (ibid: 725). McRobbie's argument turns on revealing 'guises' of equality, or 'seeming freedom and independence' (ibid: 731), which work to serve the 'forces' (ibid: 730) she identifies. Chief among such forces is 'the (patriarchal) Symbolic' (ibid: 723), endowed with capacity to manifest 'a containment strategy' in the face of the threat of 'possible disruption to the stable binaries of sexual difference' (ibid: 723).

It is clear that McRobbie addresses the same problems as much research with women's sport i.e. the relations between femininity, women's participation in previously male enclaves and 'possible disruption to the stable binaries of sexual difference' (2007: 723). In McRobbie's analysis whether and how the 'spectacle of excessive femininity' (ibid: 725) (a term that could easily be applied to roller derby dress as previously described) undermines or sustains gender hierarchies is settled and resolved. Women's participation as subjects of governance, and in the worlds of politics, employment and sexual freedom, thus 'in actuality ensures the re-stabilization of gender hierarchies' (2007: 727). I have selected McRobbie as a clear example of the foreclosure of ambivalence in contemporary work with gender. There is little room in McRobbie's approach for a more ambiguous appreciation of how different forms of femininity can be analyzed as subversive critiques of hegemonic

masculinity, and/or of normative forms of femininity. Ambivalence runs through the post-feminist masquerade, as 'gender retrenchment is secured, paradoxically, through the wide dissemination of discourses of female freedom and (putative) equality' (2007: 720), but in the final analysis, *in actuality* 'gender retrenchment' trumps 'discourses of female freedom'.

Hawkesworth's (1997, 2006) review of work by Steven Smith, Judith Butler and R.W. Connell exemplifies a related approach to gender theory. From the start Hawkesworth is concerned with 'the multiplicity of meanings accorded gender in contemporary feminist scholarship' (2006: 149). Hawkesworth locates the issue of ambivalence at a conceptual level, and does with the concept of 'gender' what other researchers have done with femininity in sport; asking if it subverts or reasserts a gender hierarchy founded in notions of immutable natural difference. Hawkesworth's argument begins with how Smith, Butler and Connell expose biological determinism, or 'the natural attitude', as a falsely conscious belief in a supposedly objective cause – nature, or biology – shaping human behavior, that feminist social science can reveal to have a social, cultural, economic or political genesis. The second half of Hawkesworth's critique, similar to MacInnes (1998), is that once this critical move is done, it is immediately succeeded by the replacement of biological 'sex' with social-cultural 'gender' as a causal, explanatory, functional force, operating according to a 'cunning of culture' (Hawkesworth, 1997: 682) working in the interests of reproduction, both biological and cultural.

Hawkesworth argues that 'gender' should be used 'as an analytic device that fosters emancipatory projects' (1997: 680) but concludes that the reviewed theories are 'haunted by the spectre of biological determinism' (ibid: 674) and thus all ultimately produce a 'functional narrative of gender' (ibid: 681) in which gender is attributed a causal force (ibid: 680), and 'replicates rather than undermines the natural attitude' (2006, 150). Both Hawkesworth and McRobbie's arguments follow the logic of what Latour has described as modern critique, whereby:

> Antifetishists debunk objects they don't believe in by showing the productive and projective forces of people; then, without ever making the connection, they use objects they do believe in to resort to the causalist or

> mechanist explanation and debunk conscious capacities of people whose behavior they don't approve of… This is why you can be at once and without even sensing any contradiction (1) an antifetishist for everything you don't believe in—for the most part religion, popular culture, art, politics, and so on; (2) an unrepentant positivist for all the sciences you believe in—sociology, economics, conspiracy theory, genetics, evolutionary psychology, semiotics (2004: 240-241)

I want to suggest, further, that a purging of ambivalence, establishing semantic certainty and singularity of meaning, (Bauman, 1993: 7) is central to Hawkesworth's project. For instance, Hawkesworth argues for 'crucial distinctions' in work with gender, proposing a list of terms, 'sexed embodiedness, sexuality, sexual identity, gender identity, gendered divisions of labor, gendered social relations and gender symbolism' in an effort towards unambiguous meaning 'rather than collapsing such diverse notions into the single term *gender'* (1997: 682 emphasis original). Ambivalence here remains at the level of a language error (Bauman, 1993: 1) a problem in the realm of semantics. For Hawkesworth ambivalence needs to be reduced in favour of unambiguous meaning and is a conceptual problem to be solved rather than a feature of the world we seek to understand.

Scott's rejection of Hawkesworth's effort to 'scrub away ambiguity' (Scott, 1997: 698) and expunge 'contradiction, complexity, ambiguity and even disagreement' (ibid: 699) lends support to my proposition. Significantly, Scott maintains that gender very much can exist in more than one 'realm' at once and further that 'impurity, nonconformity, and unruliness' are 'the traits that have made possible feminism's most original contributions and its most important breakthroughs' (ibid 702). There is not scope in Hawkesworth's formulation for the possibility that the empirical realities we refer to, and take part in constructing, when we talk about 'gender' might themselves be a troublesome, ambivalent mixture of subversion and conformity.

Sporting legitimacy is an area of gender contestation; we can expect getting taken seriously in roller derby to be bound up with gender. A thorough ambivalence runs through research with sport and gender, and gender sociology more broadly. The

research thus begins with the assumption that it is likely that gender is 'both crossed and preserved' in participants' roller derby practice; successful performances of both masculinity and femininity in ambivalent combination are perhaps necessary to negotiating the notoriously gendered terrain of sport. The question remains however, as to how the pursuit of serious recognition relates to the ambivalent possibilities and limits for gender subversion so often identified in women's sport.

The research cannot be adequately contextualized by reference to literatures on sport and gender alone. Roller derby has also been conceptualized as an alternative sport by virtue of its DIY organization and this has lead to comparisons with riot grrrl DIY musical subcultures (Beaver, 2012; Downes et al., 2013; Pavlidis 2012; and Pavlidis & Fullagar 2013). The Women's Flat Track Derby Association's tagline 'Real. Strong. Athletic. Revolutionary' (WFTDA, 2013c: n/p) hints at the complexity of roller derby's position vis-à-vis a broader cultural field of sport. Whilst incorporating some dominant sports values such as competition, athleticism, official rules and rankings (Grindstaff & West, 2006: 504; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998: 253), WFTDA emphasizes the 'by the skaters, for the skaters' (WFTDA, 2013d: n/p) *revolutionary* nature of the sport. Roller derby thus provides an opportunity to problematize established thinking on sport and gender via its position on the edge of established sporting institutions. I now move on to consider existing work on professionalization and alternative sport and to situate getting taken seriously and roller derby's organizational characteristics in relation to its emergent position relative to a broader field of sport.

2.2 A Broader Field of Sport

Bourdieu proposed that 'a particular sport cannot be analyzed independently of the totality of sporting practices…. To understand a sport, whatever it may be, one must locate its position in the space of sports' (1988: 153). For Bourdieu this is a question of class, of the relative levels of symbolic, cultural, economic and social capital of participants, as well as the characteristics of different sports themselves (1988, 1991). Following Bourdieu (1988: 156-157) women's sport in general and roller derby in particular can be conceptualized as occupying a dominated position in a broader field of sport, or somewhat of a subspace in the social space of sport, where

established professional sports, played by men, and particularly those that articulate a middle or upper class habitus are culturally, institutionally and economically dominant. Roller derby's relation to other forms of sport and to a generalized conception of 'sport' is refracted through the combination of its women-led character, its DIY organization and its relative newness as a 'sport for women who don't like sport'.

Moreover, Bourdieu describes how 'sport is the object of political struggle' (1991: 365), and specifically that the 'social definition of sport is an object of struggles… in which what is at stake *inter alia,* is the monopolistic capacity to impose the legitimate definition of sporting practice' (ibid: 361). 'Getting taken seriously' thus becomes a question of struggle for position in a broader field, and of struggling for the power to define roller derby and perhaps alter the meaning of 'sport' in general so as to unambiguously include roller derby in its definition. Emergent sports shape a broader field, just as they are shaped by it. Indeed, 'the emergence of a new sport', produces 'systematic transformations' (1988: 154-5) of the broader space. This draws our attention to the mutually constituting relation between roller derby and a broader field implied in the definition of the field as a 'system of institutions and agents' with a 'relatively autonomous history' and 'specific chronology' (1991: 358).

In this section I draw on Bourdieu to further contextualize 'getting taken seriously' in roller derby. I consider comparable dynamics in 'alternative' sports, and trajectories from subcultural leisure activity to global commercial sports phenomena in research with, for example, snowboarding, skateboarding and surfing. This review raises questions about the relationship between seriousness and rationalization and increasing bureaucracy in league organization, and leads to asking how, indeed if, participants struggling for position in a broader field – in pursuit of serious recognition – involves shifts and alterations in what roller derby is in itself, as much as reconfigurations of a broader field. Situating roller derby in this context means asking if, and how, getting taken seriously involves the league becoming what it was once defined in opposition to, becoming 'for people who really, really like sport'.

Professionalization

Distinctions between professionals, amateurs and consumers of roller derby are only just beginning to emerge. Bourdieu proposes mapping the field of sport using 'the distribution of the different federations', their membership, 'assets' and the 'social characteristics of their directors' (1988: 153). However, National Governing Bodies (NGBs), or 'federations' in roller derby, such as exist, are an extremely recent development established by skaters themselves on a voluntary basis. Until February 2011, roller derby was not affiliated to any external sports institution; roller derby is a very new entrant into the broader field. There is no 'professional' level of roller derby competition; no skaters are (yet) paid to play. Even at the top level of play, such as WFTDA tournaments in the US and international competitions, all competitors are volunteers, the majority of whom contribute to running their leagues and organizing the competitions in which they skate for no financial remuneration. However, labeling all roller derby participants as amateurs does not take into account the distinctions that are beginning to emerge between skaters. For instance, outwith the league a small handful of skaters have won sponsorship contacts and a number have set up their own derby-related businesses.

The possibility of being paid to play roller derby can be a tantalizing, if conflict-ridden prospect:

> Due to the time commitment, the financial expenses, and frustration with the slow, democratic, decision-making process, rollergirls admit there are times when they wish a league owner paid them to skate. However, they also recognize that working for someone else would result in the loss of control over their athletic activity and the bouts they produce. (Beaver, 2012: 45)

Bourdieu posits the distinction between professionals and consumers of sport, as one of sport's most 'decisive political effects' (1991: 364). However, while distinctions can be drawn between those involved in the league and spectators attending public bouts, *in their DIY organization skaters both produce and consume roller derby*. Professionalization, by contrast, involves large-scale shifts whereby sport becomes 'a spectacle produced by professionals for consumption by the masses' (ibid), resulting

in the 'dispossession of lay people, who are reduced little by little to the role of spectators.' (1988: 160). I return to these issues in Chapter 5 to analyze how the formalization of the league's DIY organization involved instating bureaucratically governed distinctions between skaters, particularly according to rationalized notions of *competition*.

It is clear that 'the social meaning attached to a sporting practice by its dominant social users… can change' (Bourdieu, 1988: 158). The definition of roller derby has 'objective polysemy', 'partial indetermination', and thus is 'liable to several uses' among and between those 'who oppose one another on the one true use, the proper use, the right way' (ibid) to practice and to label roller derby. Using 'sport' and 'roller derby' as labels can imply the homogeneity of participations, Bourdieu reminds us however that what counts as, for instance, 'tennis, rugby and wrestling' (ibid) are a diverse array of class-inflected practices, and that their definition, as well as that of 'sport', is subject to multiple struggles.

Getting taken seriously implies both negotiating professionalization and associated struggle over the definition of roller derby; getting taken seriously involves contestation, over what roller derby is and who can play it. Getting taken seriously is a question of participants' negotiation of how to change what roller derby is and/or altering the composition of a broader field of sport. Themes from classic sociologies of organizations, institutions and bureaucracies are relevant here, particularly the idea that as bureaucracies develop different forms of solidarity and interest groups emerge, the relation between ends and means shifts, and deliberate reflexive actions have unintended consequences (Michels, 1959; Weber, 1978, 2006). The league is only just beginning to embark upon these sociologically well-rehearsed trajectories, meaning that it is a timely and appropriate context from which to ask how seriousness relates to organizational change.

A variety of sports and sport-like practices have been analyzed as following comparable trajectories in relation to a broader field, where professionalization, issues of 'commercialization', media representation and especially *competition* are particularly salient.

‘Alternative’ Sports

Research participants are increasingly ambivalent about descriptions of roller derby as anything other than ‘real, legitimate sport’ (Downes et al., 2013). For this very reason, considering a variety of sports practices that have been described as ‘alternative’ further situates the pursuit of serious recognition in the league. ‘Alternative’, ‘lifestyle’, ‘subcultural’, ‘action’, ‘extreme’ or even ‘whiz’ (Midol & Broyer, 1995) sports have received much sociological attention (Wheaton, 2010, and see Tomlinson et al., 2005 for a full discussion of this variety of terms). For instance, snowboarding (Humphreys, 1997), surfing (Beal & Smith, 2010), skateboarding (Beal &Weidman, 2003), parkour (Atkinson, 2009; Wheaton & Gilchrist, 2011) and skydiving (Anderson & Taylor, 2010), have been analyzed in terms of oppositional, resistant ‘subcultural’ (Crosset & Beal, 1997; Donnelly, 2006) relations to ‘mainstream’ (Humphreys, 1997), ‘dominant’ (Coates et al., 2010: 1096) or ‘capitalist’ (ibid) sport, as well as in terms of incorporation, (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011: 830) co-optation and commodification (Rinehart, 2003), and professionalization and rationalization (Beal & Smith, 2010)

It is notable that in research with ‘alterative’ sports, similar to women’s sport, emancipatory and resistant possibilities, for ‘authentic’ (Wheaton & Beal, 2003: 155) ‘anti-capitalist’ (Coates et al., 2010: 1086), ‘counter-hegemonic’ (Atkinson, 2010: 1251) or ‘subcultural’ (Stranger, 2010: 1117) practices, have received much attention (Wheaton 2004, 2007). In general, research focuses on the well rehearsed ‘complexity and contradiction’ (Stranger, 2010: 1129; Edwards & Corte 2010: 1135) in the relations between ‘alternative’ sport and ‘bureaucratic hegemonic control’ (Coates et al., 2010: 1086) or ‘dominant culture’ (Stranger, 2010: 1129). For instance, Coates et al. suggest that ‘snowboarding today has not been shaped simply by incorporation of dominant sporting practices, or purely in opposition to them’ (2010: 1082). Edwards & Corte detail how ‘many BMX riders criticize and resist the influence of mass-market commercialization while others seized the opportunity to co-operate with it’ (2010: 1147). However, alongside international ‘mainstream’ sports, sports advertising and sports ‘mega-events’ (Chawansky, 2011), alternative sports are arenas where whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, transphobia and

normative embodiment both remain dominant and are subject to on-going contestation (Anderson, 1999; Cavanagh & Sykes 2006; Cole & Hribar, 1995; Wheaton & Beal 2003; Yochim 2009). Alternative sports are 'kinda subversive, kinda hegemonic' [3].

Of particular relevance is the relation between *competition* and professionalization and commercialization in alternative sports. A rejection of competition is central to Birrell & Richter's (1994) account of women's softball as emancipatory and Beaver contrasts DIY roller derby to the 'rationalized sets of rules, competition, and the win-at-all-cost attitude found in mainstream sport' (2012: 29). Thorpe & Wheaton suggest that 'despite the rapid institutionalization, professionalism and commercialization of action sports, many participants continue to privilege fun, friendship and creative expression… over winning' (2011: 839). Coates et al. suggest that in snowboarding competition is 'valued as a celebration and avenue for individual progression rather than focusing on a winning team' (2010: 1086). However, 'at a professional level achievement is encouraged, demonstrating incorporation of the capitalist values of 'mainstream' sport' (ibid) and a 'win-at-all-costs focus' which detracts from the 'freedom' of snowboarding (ibid: 1093).

Winning and competition are central to professional sport, and especially to its mass-mediation as a consumer spectacle:

> …above all, the more exclusively it is concerned with that other dimension of the sporting spectacle, suspense and anxiety as to the result, thereby encouraging players and especially organizer to aim for victory at all costs. In other words, everything seems to suggest that, in sport as in music, extension of the public beyond the circle of amateurs helps to reinforce the reign of the pure professionals. (Bourdieu, 1991: 364)

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[3] A growing body of work seeks a way through this familiar impasse, through turning to embodied experience and affect (Atkinson, 2009, 2010; Thorpe & Rinehart, 2010). For instance Stranger foregrounds participants' 'shared foundational experience of transcendence– a sublime loss of self in the act of surfing.' (ibid: 1129). Similarly Throsby centers the '"shifted sensorium" of marathon swimming' (2013a: 5) in a move away from 'entrenched ways of thinking about embodiment' (ibid: 18) and from a Cartesian mind-body split (see also Throsby 2013b).

In giving an account of the relationship between seriousness and organizational change in the league, in Chapter 5, I develop an analysis of how competition increasingly informed participants' organizational practice, and particularly of how as the value of competition was *instituted* it led to the creation and administration of distinctions between skaters.

In their research with a different form of 'alternative' sport, a UK-based rugby union club for gay and bisexual men, Price & Parker explore the possibilities for 'challenges to gender norms' (2003: 108) in gay sports subculture, and suggest that the club can either be 'co-opted into mainstream rugby culture' (ibid) or challenge the same; similar to McRobbie's reading of femininity, it is an either/or possibility:

> Gay sports culture either promotes a liberal view of "inclusion" into mainstream sporting arenas, or, alternatively, challenges heterosexist definitions of sport as an "exclusive" cultural practice. (Price & Parker ibid: 109)

While 'stereotypes' were disrupted by the club's existence and everyday practice (ibid), ultimately, 'heterosexist definitions of sport' were 'reinforced' (ibid: 121) as the club attempted to 'gain respect within mainstream rugby culture' (ibid: 122). As sporting legitimacy became more of an issue in the club, heterosexual players were admitted, a decision justified by the rationale that winning games and the competitiveness of individual players was what mattered. Price & Parker argue that such dynamics diluted the political potential of the club as specifically for gay and bisexual men. In this example it seems that increasing emphasis on competition was accompanied by a reconfiguration of the values of the club. Seeking 'respect within mainstream rugby culture' involved changing what the club was and whom it was for.

While rudimentary distinctions between skaters and ways to earn a living from roller derby are only in the most fledgling of stages the above review raises the question of whether, and how, the pursuit of serious recognition is indicative of the league becoming what it was once defined in opposition to. Situating roller derby in relation to a broader field shows that a concern with serious recognition is precisely what we

would expect among participants. While seriousness can be imagined as a synonym for professionalism and rationalization, and while these processes are well-documented in sociology, an analysis of seriousness-in-practice can both unsettle and develop this field.

Bourdieu's legacy has perhaps received the most acclaim as a set of theoretical tools for systematically tracing the relations between the macro- and micro- social. In Bourdieu's words, the 'opposition between structure and change, between statics and dynamics, is completely fictitious' (1988: 155) and thus he aims at a method for 'establishing a dialectic between the general and the particular' (ibid: 156). That 'one must not forget that this space [of sports] is the site of forces that do not act on it alone' (ibid: 155) reminds us that struggle over the definition of roller derby is also struggle over gender, women and sport, and self-organization more broadly. Accordingly I now turn to how relationships between structure and agency are remarkably tangible in, and salient to, participants' practical negotiations of seriousness, when we consider the league as an example of self-made culture.

2.3 Structure & Agency

It is not too much of a generalization to claim that most work discussed thus far refers to, if not turns on, some version of a structure/agency binary. Roller derby's do-it-yourself (DIY) status affords ample empirical opportunity to explore unintended 'structural' consequences of 'agency', and moreover to explore participants' negotiation of the middle ground between such binary extremities. For existing research with roller derby that posits it as 'subcultural' (Beaver, 2012; Finley, 2010; Pavlidis, 2012), DIY organizational structure is central to an 'alternative', or potentially subversive character:

> By establishing leagues that operate according to a "by the skater, for the skater" ethic, rollergirls have created a model of nonalienated sport for women: They control their athletic activity, the labor that goes into running the leagues, and the roller derby bouts that are the product of this labor. (Beaver, 2012: 45)

The league is evidently constituted in the voluntarism of its members' actions; 'they control their athletic activity'. DIY organization contributes to an ambivalent

position relative to a broader field of sport, in which serious recognition becomes such an issue. Roller derby is thus a particularly apt empirical context from which to unravel trends in theories of structure/agency, particularly the notion of movement between dramatized 'extremes of compulsion and voluntarity' (Sedgwick, 2003; 13). In this section I suggest that Latour's (2010) concept of 'factish' contextualizes not only the relation between human action and that which informs and constrains such action, but how in practice skaters move between the two poles. This section thus provides some theoretical background, especially for Chapter 7, where I center an analysis of how participants continue to make their league.

Much social theory is occupied with tensions between structure/agency, determinism/free-will, or objectivity/subjectivity and the relation of such binary pairs in explanations of why we do the things we do. Accounts of interactions between the determining, constraining and enabling character of e.g. culture, religion and institutions have been present since the emergence of sociology as a discipline (Durkheim, 1897; Weber, 1930). Most canonical works attend to the mutual co-constitution of structure and agency, as in Marx's dictum that 'men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please' (1952: n/p). In the later decades of the twentieth century diverse theorists increasingly reach for the ambivalent middle ground (e.g. Giddens 1986; Foucault, 1976, 1980) between structure and agency, as post-structuralist, feminist and queer sociology all make various attempts to move away from binary categories of thought, whether this be body/mind, nature/culture, rationality/emotion or structure/agency (Butler, 1990, 1994; Deluze & Guattari, 1987; Flax, 1990; Fraser, 1989; Halberstam 1998; Haraway, 1988, 1991, 1997; Nicholas, 2009; Nicholson, 1990; Seidman, 1996).

Roller derby's DIY organization is intertwined with gender; it 'also means the majority of leagues are owned and operated by women' (Beaver, 2012: 26), and is interpreted as further indicative of roller derby's political potential, in a context where the underrepresentation of women in management or leadership positions in sport is well documented (Messner, 2002):

> Women's flat track roller derby is not a women's version of a traditional men's sport. In this sport, interactions between women have defined the

> rules and built the organizations; women own and operate their own do-it-yourself teams… Unlike most women's sports, derby is rooted in local alternative subcultures and has no association with "legitimate sports" grounded in educational institutions or commercial enterprise. The juxtaposition of these features makes derby a challenge to gender beyond women's simple participation in competitive sports. (Finley, 2010: 367-368)

While DIY organization is interpreted as contributing to opportunities for gender subversion, roller derby as tangibly, self-consciously *made*, is rarely at the center of existing research.

Research with other forms of self-organized culture however, offers a necessary corrective to celebratory accounts of radical potential, by paying attention to conflict and contestation. Thornton discusses how, in research with 'youth subcultures', 'a great deal of extant research has both over-politicised their leisure and at the same time has ignored the subtle relations of power at play within them' (1997: 14, see also Downes, 2009). In relation to roller derby, Beaver concludes with a call for additional research that:

> …focuses on the day-to-day operations of DIY sport organizations, including the types of conflict that occur within them, would be fruitful. What participants say about the DIY ethic is important, but what they do also requires examination. This research could help to further highlight the ways in which the DIY ethos does and does not live up to its radical potential. (Beaver 2012; 46)

In Chapter 4 I give an account of how participants make sense of the league's beginnings, including reflections on the informal hierarchies, inclusions and exclusions that characterized the DIY organization of this period. Chapter 5 focuses on the reverberating effects of institutionalizing DIY organization, including the development of bureaucratically administrated distinctions between skaters. The research thus in part answers Beaver's call for accounts of DIY organization in practice, just as the league's DIY status complicates participants' concerns with seriousness and alerts us to how the league, and perhaps roller derby more broadly, are explicitly made in skaters' collaborative action.

DIY organization is encoded in the league's written constitution and code of conduct; both documents devised and revised by league members. Just as Law posits the social world as a 'remarkably emergent phenomenon' that '*in its processes shapes its own flows*' (1994: 15 emphasis added) not only do skaters do the voluntary work of running their league; they have made, and continue to re-make, some of the structures that they act within. To what extent the league can change in response to skaters' reflexive decision-making is subject to tangible renegotiation as participants work out in practice what roller derby *is* as they put seriousness into practice.

Here is where Latour comes in. Latour demonstrates how, in 'modern critique', structure/agency are doubly separated:

> To use the language of philosophers, no one has ever been able to distinguish between immanence and transcendence. But this stubborn refusal to choose always shows up, we now understand, as simple practice, as something that can never be spoken or theorized, even if the "actors themselves" keep on saying it and describing it in luxurious detail. (Latour, 2010: 28)

That 'construction and reality are synonyms' (ibid: 24) remains a secret that everybody, in practice, knows but that when it comes to theorizing, remains unspoken. Latour thus identifies two separations that occur in 'the modern critical repertoire', a first between transcendence/immanence, and a second 'more subtle distinction' between this separation that is instituted in theory and a passage between transcendence/immanence 'that they carry out in their practice' (ibid: 20). It is precisely this double separation, the 'passage between construction and reality' that 'theory has broken' (ibid: 31).

In advancing the concept of the 'factish' Latour seems to be in pursuit of an analysis that does not make this double de-bunking move, and that does not foreclose, or resolve ambivalence. Using the neologism 'factish' to understand religious and scientific objects (totems, amulets, sacred stones, Pasteur's yeast…) is a critical move designed to unsettle the more usual distinction between object/subject, and to open up space for how 'what we fabricate always goes beyond us' (Latour, 2010: 22). I think Butler is in pursuit of a similar critical position, a way to enable and

allow ambivalence to continue, when she asks; 'If subordination is the condition of possibility for agency, how might agency be thought in opposition to the forces of subordination?' (1997b: 10-11) and answers, 'ambivalence forms the bind of agency' (ibid: 13).

An understanding of roller derby and the league as both fabricated by human hands and existing beyond such fabrication does not make this empirical context in itself anything particularly unusual. What is striking however is the explicitness with which it is so. When skaters debate whether roller derby is for 'women who don't like sport' or 'people who really, really like sport' what is at stake is the degree to which roller derby can be *what they make it*. Due to the stage of emergence and newness that roller derby currently occupies, this dynamic is not a secret, it is too big to ignore. In the league the distinction, between what is made by and what exists outside skaters' own hands, is in the early stages and processes of being established. Taking *practice* as 'the clandestine wisdom of the passage' between construction and reality, and as 'one of those secrets that everybody knows about' (Latour, 2010: 24) the research explores how, in getting taken seriously, participants traverse such a passage between contingency/inevitability.

Taking roller derby as an example of DIY organization, it becomes clear that, thinking about factishes is a particularly useful way to foreground ambivalence, and raises questions about the way that participants move between supposedly polarized opposites as they work together to make their league. There is a need for empirical research that traces movements between voluntarism/determinism, not just with 'natural' and 'scientific' objects, but with the simultaneous and synonymous construction/reality involved in bringing a collection of new, undeniably social, evidently constructed relations/objects/discourses into being. As participants struggle to make roller derby intelligible as 'serious sport' it becomes possible to ask, in the unintended 'structural' consequences of participants' 'agency' and action, does the league become what it was originally defined in opposition to, and how to participants continue to make the league in this context? I return to this dynamic throughout the thesis, in analyses of how participants make distinctions, and move between, what is and is not conducive to serious recognition and by asking how

participants continue to *make* their league, roller derby and sport more broadly, just as in turn their league and roller derby become established as institutions and, alongside 'sport', inform the possibilities and limits of their action.

Thus far this review has described empirical and theoretical precedents that together, work to contextualize participants' concerns with serious recognition, and point towards seriousness as an appropriate focus of inquiry. Roller derby's movement along trajectories of 'real, serious sport' can be understood as another instance of professionalization or struggle for position in a field of power (Bourdieu, 1988, 1991: 361-367; 1993) or through classic analyses of rationalization, bureaucracy and disenchantment (Weber 1948; 2006). However, the thematic prevalence of seriousness in my empirical material led me to prioritize giving an ethnographic account of 'getting taken seriously'.

Looking Forward: Seriousness in Practice

'Seriousness' is a concept that emerges from participants' vocabularies. Its definition is therefore cumulative, and continues throughout subsequent chapters, especially Chapter 6, where I draw on theoretical engagements with seriousness in, variously, existentialism (de Beauvoir, 1976; Sartre, 2003), literary theory (Bakhtin, 1984), and anthropology and ethnography (Candea, 2011; Viveiros de Castro 2011) to analyze participants' enactments of seriousness in practice in their movement towards serious recognition. The field of Leisure Studies, is one notable area where 'seriousness' has been operationalized previously, and this is particularly so in the Serious Leisure Perspective (SLP) (Stebbins, 1982, 2011). Galvanized by the notable divergence between participants' practices of 'seriousness' and the use of this concept in the SLP I have argued elsewhere for the necessity of a more robustly sociological approach to seriousness (Breeze, 2013b). In developing a sociological analysis of seriousness, the limitations of 'seriousness' in the SLP came into focus.

The SLP classifies leisure activities into an extensive taxonomy according to relative degrees of 'seriousness'. 'Serious leisure' is distinguished as 'sufficiently substantial

and interesting for the participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of its special skills and knowledge' (Stebbins, 1992: 3). Aside from further distinctions, seen as obfuscation by some (Martin, 2008), the 'qualities distinguishing serious leisure from unserious forms' (Stebbins, 1982: 256) have remained substantially unchanged since first outlined in the early 1980s (ibid: 256-258, see also Breeze, 2013b). In brief, formulations of seriousness in the SLP are overly descriptive and restricted to an individual level; the core of the perspective does not do the sociological work of connecting personal troubles and public issues (Mills, 1959).

Critical responses to the SLP identify intersectional inequalities in 'serious leisure' participation (Bartram, 2001; Raisborough, 2007; Rotolo & Wilson, 2007). For example, Raisborough criticizes the scant attention given to questions of access in the SLP; 'the emphasis is upon the benefits and progression of a career [in serious leisure] with relatively little to suggest that reaching for the first rung of the career ladder, or the career itself, is problematized by wider socio-cultural relations' (2006: 246; 2007). Similarly feminist critique of the SLP identifies 'androcentrism at the heart of Stebbins' conceptualization' (Dilley & Scraton 2010: 126), and suggests that women's access to serious leisure is diminished by a high likelihood of homemaking or caring responsibilities (Gillespie et al., 2002: 294; Stalp, 2006). Seriousness is an issue of gender contestation.

The SLP is flawed by the assumption, built into the definition of serious leisure, that serious leisure is simply a 'good' (Breeze, 2013b). I am not suggesting the opposite, that seriousness in leisure is *bad,* but rather that seriousness itself is generative; it has multiple and ambivalent ordering effects. Reading the SLP through my empirical material it is clear that contrary to the normative assumption that serious leisure is a 'good', seriousness is more fruitfully analyzed, borrowing from John Law (2004), as a 'mode of ordering'; seriousness becomes a 'recursive ordering pattern' (1994: 83) that is identifiable in 'specific strategies of reflexivity and self-reflexivity' (ibid: 107). From this perspective, seriousness, rather than a normative description of some forms of leisure, is generative of, and generated in, practice. Seriousness is brought into being in, and continues to inform, skaters' everyday practice of roller derby.

Participants' claims for serious recognition and enactments of seriousness are neither entirely singular nor coherent, but include critiques of the gendering of serious sport in strategies of ridicule and satire; seriousness-in-practice is resolutely multiple, ambivalent and incoherent.

The thesis does not set out to prove or disprove any of the theories considered in this literature review. On the contrary, via situating roller derby in relation to existing work on sport and gender, professionalization and structure/agency it becomes apparent that while questions of serious sit at the intersections of well-established sociological concerns, seriousness itself represents something of a gap in the literature. With Sedgwick's summarization echoing throughout, the crux of this review is three-fold. Firstly that while ambiguity akin to *kinda subversive, kinda hegemonic* runs through much of the work considered here, such ambivalence is rarely centered or fully realized. Secondly while existing work is extremely helpful in contextualizing *why* getting taken seriously is an issue in the league, such work does not account for *how seriousness is negotiated in practice*. Thirdly, there is a need for empirical research that centers the practical passage in-between extremes of voluntarism and determinism.

The research thus begins with the observation that roller derby occupies an ambivalent and shifting, position of organizational and gendered alterity relative to a broader cultural field of sport, from which getting taken seriously comes to be a concern. Seriousness is a core empirical feature of the research context, which upon review, can be see to be inadequately operationalized in existing work; getting taken seriously in roller derby is a novel research focus through which to develop new ways of understanding familiar sociological problems.

It is in this context that the thesis presents, firstly, an account of participants practical negotiations of seriousness, and getting taken seriously, and secondly, asks how, and indeed if, in pursuit of serious recognition did the league becomes what it was

initially defined in opposition to. Chapters 4 through 7 respond to questions of: the relationship between seriousness and the occasions for gender subversion/conformity previously identified in women's sport; the relationship between seriousness and organizational change akin to the early phases of professionalization; how participants make distinctions between what is, and is not, conducive to serious recognition; and how participants continue to make their league, roller derby and sport more broadly, just as in turn their league and roller derby become established as institutions and, alongside 'sport', inform the possibilities and limits of their action.

In the following chapter I outline and discuss the research methodology, setting out how research with the league, using a continuum of ethnographic methods, generates empirical material in response to the questions raised in this chapter. Additionally, Chapter 3 sets out the justifications for the thesis interludes, in which seriousness is considered as a methodological issue with implications for the research epistemology.

3. Method & Methodology

[The league] is just infused with you, there's all these little things that are just you, and but now you're this researcher, researching us, and there are people who don't even really know who you are, and you're one of my best friends, and I can't reconcile all those things together in my head.

Lady Garden, field-notes, November 2012

In April 2008 I co-founded the roller derby league that in January 2009 became the subject of a research proposal and application for funding. The research methodology began with my intimate belonging, and the explicitness of my implication in the research context: I have helped to make, and continue to contribute to, the phenomena that the research is about (Delyser, 2001: 451 see also Downes, 2009; Reger 2001). Equally, 'research participants', often friends, have from the very start shaped the form and content of the research. Personal involvement informed the use of a continuum of ethnographic methods, and a reflexive, situated methodology that is indebted to feminist and poststructuralist epistemologies. The research questions grew out of my involvement in roller derby, and co-evolved with the research methods that generate data in response to them, as well as alongside changes in the league itself. Over the course of the research, as my position shifted it became necessary to develop new, complementary methods, which also arose in response to the emergence of participants' concerns with getting taken seriously.

This chapter is about these co-constituting elements of methodology in relation to emergent ethical and epistemological issues. In what follows I firstly describe the league and demonstrate how roller derby itself, combined with my 'insider' position, made the league an exceedingly appropriate research context. I discuss 'access', or rather, establishing informed consent in a context of familiarity. Secondly I describe the advantages and limitations of doing participant observation 'at home' and conducting interviews with friends and acquaintances. Thirdly I discuss the rationale for a collaborative film-making project as data generation. At the same time, as the research became ever more focused on *change* in the league, I made strategic use of my 'pre-research' experience, compiling zines (self-published magazines) and

authoring a blog in order to share research output with participants in a variety of accessible ways.

Throughout, the chapter demonstrates the fit between the research questions, methods, data generated and an analysis of seriousness, as well as the limits and ethical issues associated with the methods deployed. In the fourth and final section I outline the rationale for the thesis's interludes. I predicated the research in my 'insiderness', over the course of the project however, through injury, stopping skating and leaving the league in 2012, I became more of an 'outsider'. Transformation in the degree and character of my belonging generated both methodological opportunities and complications. In particular such shifts facilitated critical dialogue with both standard methodological debates in sociology and with those of a growing body of 'insider' research. Thus the interludes rear up in the spaces between chapters to give an account of this particular methodological aspect of the research. The chapter concludes by re-stating and summarizing the methodological assumptions that run throughout the research, and the themes that weave through the chapter linking the research questions to the findings and analysis.

3.1 Early Participation & Research Access

I only said that because I knew it would piss you off and now you've got to put it in your PhD…

Jayne Grey, November 2010

The league is a strategically selected (Blaikie, 2000: 205; Flyvbjerg, 2001: 74-78; Yin 1994: 38-41) case; a DIY organization for a women-led, emergent sport. The league initially appeared to be a context in which sport and perhaps gender were done differently. Additionally and over time it became apparent that three further features characterized the league, that it was also a case of; (i) a social context where 'getting taken seriously' was an explicit concern; (ii) a collection of identities, meanings and relationships that were evidently self-produced; and (iii) a phenomena that was changing, in terms of participants' understandings and in its gendered relation to a broader field of sport. These characteristics, in combination with the

long-term character of data generation, which occurred over two years and was embedded in a five-year period of on-going involvement, mark the league as an exemplary context from which to pursue the research questions.

The league's membership has grown from between three to 40 skaters turning up to twice-weekly practices throughout 2008, to a relatively stable membership of approximately 100 skaters, referees and non-skating officials (NSOs) in 2013. The league's boundaries are profoundly permeable (Gerring, 2004: 343) with a fluid population that acts together in ways that extend beyond league-organized activities. While skating membership is limited to women, and the league is in the process of developing a trans* inclusion policy, men are eligible for membership, primarily as referees. From the start membership has been restricted to those aged 18 and over, with no upper age limit. In practice while there are individual instances of skaters as young as 18 and as old as 60, most cluster around their early twenties and mid- to late-thirties. League membership is overwhelmingly white and British. Approximately two-thirds of interviewees identified as straight compared to roughly one-third as queer, bisexual, lesbian or gay.

League-related activities include; organizing, coaching and attending training up to four times a week for between two and three hours a time; attending league-wide, or team and committee-specific meetings (often multiple meetings each week); organizing, competing in and attending bouts, boot-camps, after-parties and fundraisers; and participating in league-wide and committee-specific email lists and online forum discussions. In addition to these 'formal' activities the lives of members are intertwined, with skaters working together in shops, bars and cafes; studying together at university; going out drinking, dancing and singing karaoke together; living together; having relationships with each other; eating together; going to watch bouts in nearby cities; visiting each other in hospital after giving birth or after breaking bones playing derby. I was fully participating in almost all of these activities as I began to research with the league; I was already an active and embedded participant.

I acted as 'co-chair' of the league's Board from 2008 until 2010 when I stepped down in a move away from any 'leadership' role as I began to focus on generating

data through interviews. I volunteered on Sports & Training Committee and Finance Committee from 2009-2012 and skated on the league's 'A' and occasionally 'B' team between 2008-2011. During this time I attended practice 50 weeks a year and occasionally coached. I facilitated meetings, got stressed out at the sheer volume of league emails, got drunk at parties, and was elated and dejected when we won and lost. I helped write and amend policies and voted in the near-weekly votes on issues from what to call new teams to whether the league should join WFTDA. When injured I worked as bench coach, as an announcer, and as a non-skating official.

Traditionally, ethnographic methods hinge on 'first hand participation in some *initially unfamiliar* social world' (Emerson et al., 1995: 1 emphasis added); being attuned to the strangeness of a new context as a fish out of water. The process of initiation, of learning how to belong, is posited as central to generating and analyzing empirical material (ibid, see also Clifford & Marcus, 1986). 'Insider' research turns such dynamics on their head. In this instance the challenge was not to gain access but to maintain my belonging and make it methodologically useful and ethically sound. This inverted polarity, that I used to belong intimately, but eventually became almost an outsider, speaks to the conflicts and dilemmas of 'the potential repercussions that professionalizing the personal may have… for those of us whose place of research may also be a personal space of refuge' (DeLyser, 2001: 446).

There is much precedent for, and debate around, 'insider research' (Beck, 1967; Merton, 1972; Smetherham, 1978) and the same is true of related approaches such as auto-ethnography (Ellis, 2004; Burdell & Swadener, 1999), auto/biography (Inckle 2010; Leskelä-Kärki, 2008; Stanley 1990) and endo-anthropology (Candea, 2011). These discussions draw on feminist and queer methodology (Browne, 2003; Cooper, 2010; Reger, 2001), as well as trends in participatory, practitioner and action research (Freire, 1982; Hall, 1992; Heron, 1995; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Moreover, there is precedent for this kind of research specifically in sport sociology (Drummond, 2010; Miller, 1999; Ryder 2010), and sociologies of subculture (Downs, 2009; Furness, 2012; Hodkinson, 2005) as well as in qualitative methods more broadly (Brogden, 2010; Chavez, 2008; Davidson, 2011, Davies & Davies, 2007; Lederman, 2006).

At the outset it seemed clear that the research would be characterized by my 'insider' status. The advantages of such a position are well documented (Taylor J, 2011: 6) and include notions that intimate belonging facilitates 'deeper' (ibid) levels of understanding, enhanced rapport and trust, and ready and regular access to and contact with the research context and to a variety of forms of communication with participants. Roseneil (1993) summarizes the opportunities of 'insider' research in the idea that it enables research to begin from a position of empirical literacy. In general the strengths of insider research turn on the notion that familiarity facilitates *access to meaning* that might otherwise be inaccessible (Adler and Adler, 1987; Edwards, 2002; Platt, 1981)

While J Taylor (2011: 6) has identified a comparative lack of critical assessment, 'insider' research generates as many methodological challenges as it does opportunities. Kuwayama suggests that 'some things' can escape insiders' attention and so are 'better analyzed from outside' (2003: 13, see also Agar, 1996: 94). Equally, DeLyser describes how interviewees can assume that 'insider' researchers 'already know the answers' (2001: 443-444), thus stifling conversation and Wade (1984) documents difficulties in 'switching roles' between researcher and participant. Centrally, Bennett (2003) questions the relationship between cultural proximity and authoritative data; the primary challenge centers around the question of how to bring sociological insights to bear on data generated in familiarity. 'The danger of rooting knowledge in the description of individual experiences is that one never moves beyond them' (Oakley, 1998: 723): the charge here is one of anecdotal, subjective or biased knowledge.

In considering the strengths and limitations of 'insider' research it is crucial to foreground how belonging does not automatically lead to understanding (Delyser, 2001: 441; Merton, 1972: 44). Crucially, decades of poststructuralist work have demonstrated the danger of 'privileging knowledge that is constructed within dichotomous rubrics such as insider/outsider' (Taylor J, 2011: 6). The boundaries of such positions are always porous and fluid (Merton, 1972), and moreover, there is no homogeneity to either position, rather both are multiple and contestable: 'There is no monolithic insider view…every view is *a* way of seeing, not *the* way of seeing'

(Wolcott, 1999: 137, emphasis original). Epistemologically the research takes its cue from such on-going debates, and begins from the observation that 'all drawings of inside-outside boundaries in knowledge are theorized as power moves, not moves towards truth' (Haraway, 1988: 576, see also Browne, 2003). In practical terms, the methodological opportunities of researching 'at home', not only out-weighed the challenges, but also are particularly suited to the character of the research.

Significantly, the tensions in researching 'at home' are bound up with arguments as to what should be *taken seriously* and how. Viveiros de Castro has recently argued that anthropology should 'strive to take seriously things that are far from or outside of us, almost all of the things that we must *not* take seriously are near to or inside of us' (2011: 133). This proposal is deliberately asymmetrical (Candea, 2011: 147) in contrast to the symmetry that both Law (2004) and Latour (2004) have called for. This is only the very beginning of the story of convergences between 'taking seriously' and the epistemological issues of researching 'at home', which I return to in the final section of this chapter. For now I turn to the practicalities of negotiating consent, and of working with existing friendships as research materials.

When research began I already had access to not only the 'public' aspects of league activity but more 'private' settings too; email lists and restricted areas of the forum for the Board and each committee. I was pleasurably and painfully entangled in the daily ups and downs of friendships and team dynamics. Establishing informed consent began with informal conversations with my league-mates as I applied for funding and compiled my research proposal. These conversations continued throughout my MSc, as I often shared articles from my literature review with league-mates, and in some cases we discussed them together. Beginning research I developed more formal approaches, and sought official approval from the league's Board. Consent from 'gatekeepers' alone was insufficient however and I also produced explanatory leaflets (appendix iii) and distributed these at practices throughout Autumn 2010, and started a discussion thread on the league's online forum, accessible to all members. The forum thread enabled skaters to ask questions and make suggestions, and I used it to provide feedback on the analyses I was pursuing. Similarly, during the period of 'formal' participant observation

(approximately October 2010 until April 2012) I produced progress reports, disseminated by email and detailing research activities (appendix iv). Consent procedures were thus ongoing, rather than a one-off event (Crow et al., 2006; Shannon, 2007).

Informed consent was augmented and troubled in the often-surprising ways that participants continued to draw attention to research activities. Just as Jayne Grey said 'roller derby isn't a real sport' just to 'piss me off' because I would 'have to put it in' my thesis, participants regularly and joyously disrupted the usual power dynamics of research. Riding the bus to practice with Aladdin in late 2010 she asks me, ‘am I going to be in your roller derby book?’ I tell her yes, definitely, and she responds, ‘you know I’ll be really upset if I’m not’. Similarly, as Pauline Baynes and I are getting our kit on in the corridor before practice in late 2010, we chat to two women who are asking excitably about roller derby. Afterwards, as we skate into the hall Pauline asks, with a cheeky grin, ‘are you gonna put that in your field-notes?’ I tell her ‘No but I’m definitely going to write down that you just asked me that!’

In one sense Jayne, Aladdin and Pauline seemed to be asserting their agency within the terms of our research relationships. Each of them ‘reminded’ me that I am doing research, but at the same time interrupted the prerogative of researchers to decide what occurrences are noted down. Theses ‘reminders’ called attention to their awareness of the research and re-stated their ability to engage with it. Jayne, Pauline and Aladdin made ‘meta’ comments on not just what the research is about, but on how I go about doing it. Moreover, each instance is something of a joke, drawing attention to the awkwardness of doing research with one’s friends. Perhaps such jokes both articulated and reduced our mutual discomfort with our new relationships. These jokes articulated a sense of comfort too; my impression at the time was that I was trusted to do ethical research. My suspicion is that although such trust was fostered by the visibility of consent procedures, it was predominantly based in preexisting friendships, earned prior to the research.

Participants’ engagements with the research process invite critique. The supposed danger here is that participants’ self-awareness somehow degrades the validity and reliability of empirical material. Such an argument relies upon notions of a social

reality that exists independent of perceptions of it and prior to attempts to know it (Law, 2011), rather than as collaboratively and performatively manifest; as if we only act 'authentically' when we think that nobody is watching. However, the research questions are *about* how participants reflexively articulate roller derby and their own identities, and about how doing so is in part an attempt to shape others' interpretations. Generating empirical material in response to the research questions takes place along a continuum of spontaneity and moments deliberately contrived for research. This spectrum is expressed in two complementary methods, participant observation and interviewing. I now turn to a discussion of both and their fit with the research questions.

3.2 Participant Observation & Interviews

I completed approximately nineteen consecutive months of ethnographic participant observation, embedded in a five year period of ongoing and shifting belonging, and in which the 'field' comprised all the formal business of the league and those informal activities described in the previous section. The challenge of participant observation was to how to observe and make records, how to generate appropriate empirical material in familiar contexts. Contemporaneous note-taking was difficult if not impossible during practices and bouts, when my whole body was focused on skating, hitting, stopping, changing direction, shouting at referees, discussing tactics and technique and learning and applying embodied skills in concert with others. I had more success writing up notes immediately after practices and meetings, although this too was difficult to sustain when both often ran late into the night. Recalling events the following day, or even a few days after their occurrence tested my memory, but the middle-distance provided space to make connections between the micro-details of meetings, practices, bouts and exuberant conversations in the pub and the broader research aims.

Existing relationships became central to participant observation. Between summer 2010 and Autumn 2011 I shared a flat with Tiny Chancer, and we often held Sports & Training Committee meetings in our kitchen. Such close proximity afforded ample opportunity for informal interviewing, in-depth discussions of the triumphs and crises of the league as they happened. We lived just round the corner from Aladdin,

Felicity and Sally Tape and often hung out at each other's flats, worked-out in the nearby park and travelled to practice together, talking practically non-stop about derby and the league. I spent a disproportionate amount of time with Pauline Baynes, my 'derby wife' (see Chapter 7 for a full discussion of derby wives), and with Lady Garden, a fellow PhD researcher. Alongside those skaters consistently on the 'A' team, particularly The Beefcake and Orville, with whom I worked closely on multiple committees, these individuals became akin to 'key informants' and tended to feature heavily in my field-notes. Other long-standing members of the league, specifically Owlison, Alabama Thunder Fuck, Fred and Wilma, and newer skaters such as AY and SF, are key figures in my account, primarily due to their interviews, which I discuss below (a full list of participants is provided in appendix ii).

At first it appeared self-evident that practices and bouts were where roller derby happened, and initial participant observation was overwhelmingly focused on these contexts. This approach had a degree of success, and especially generated material concerned with participants' various engagements with femininity/masculinity in dress and bodily practice. However, in 2011 growing concerns in the league with roller derby's 'being taken seriously' coincided with my repetitive sustaining of incrementally more severe injuries to both of my knees. While injuries meant I could no longer play roller derby, skaters' preoccupations with seriousness initiated a shift in research focus, towards articulations of change in the definition of roller derby in the ways that participants organized the league and produced representations of roller derby and of themselves.

My position of 'insiderness' was changing as my involvement became less embodied. While still a member of the league I was no longer a 'skater' and it became less appropriate to say 'we' when referring to participants. I had moved from a position of full involvement in, and enjoyment of, playing roller derby to resentfully struggling through physiotherapy exercises on the floor next to my desk in-between typing up field-notes and transcribing interviews. Strategically focusing participant observation on organizational and representational practice coincided with a period of upheaval and transition, as the league closed its doors to new members and undertook comprehensive internal re-structuring. This was a stressful

time for many participants, during which I became less and less involved, more of an outsider. My knowledge of how the league operated was no longer predicated on my involvement, but upon learning things more and more 'as a researcher'; it turned out that my belonging did not last as long as the research did. I return to the implications of these dynamics in the thesis interludes.

Participant observation was complimented by interviewing. Between October 2010 and August 2012 I interviewed 26 league members in 22 formal, semi-structured interviews. Interviews were fully audio-recorded and transcribed before being thematically coded by hand. Each interview lasted between one and three hours, and took place in university rooms, in the kitchen of my flat, in cafes and bars, in sports-hall corridors and at interviewees' homes. Interviewees were recruited on a voluntary basis, via email to all league members in October 2010 and again in January 2011. I conducted two sets of paired interviews (Sally Tape and Aladdin, Fred and Wilma), and one group interview with five Fresh Meat skaters, BD, Francis Abraham, Marie, Ophelia and Vagina Dentata. As data generation drew to a close, I strategically re-interviewed both The Beefcake (an 'experienced skater') and AY (a newer skater who had experienced a long period of injury) and specifically requested an interview with Sway (who was instrumental in the league's application for WFTDA membership) and Irene Brew (who had been with the league since its inception, and recently returned after taking time off for pregnancy and childcare).

The interview sampling, while based on convenience and participants' willingness to volunteer enabled me to interview over 25% of league members, and included a mix of those who skated exclusively for the 'A' team (n=5), those who at the time of interview had skated for both the 'A' and 'B' teams (n=6), Fresh Meat skaters (n=11) and referees (n=4). This was crucial, since participants' relative experience structured their accounts, with 'A' team skaters typically, although not universally, being more invested in 'being taken seriously'. One group interview was used strategically to interview Fresh Meat skaters in order to facilitate a structured conversation *between* the five participants, so as to get a sense of their shared constructions of experience in an area of the league that I was less personally involved in. Additionally I made sure to interview a proportion of league members

who were not my close friends or team-mates (14), alongside those with whom I was more familiar (12).

Interviewees completed an informed consent form prior to the start of each interview, via which they agreed to my use of extracts from their transcripts in publications. Transcripts were sent to each interviewee for comments and feedback. Interviews also provided a structured opportunity to ask participants how they would like to be named in research output. Most interviewees choose a pseudonym that echoed derby naming practices, in being evidently made-up, involving a pun or obscure cultural reference. So refer to participants as 'The Beefcake', 'Aladdin' and 'Alabama Thunder Fuck' alongside more 'straight' names and initials, according to participants' preferences. Pseudonyms however, in the context of the league, are insufficient to guarantee participants' anonymity. Many stories that skaters tell in interviews, and their own personal trajectories within the league, for example featuring specific injuries, playing in particular games and tournaments, or occupying a key role in certain committees, make them almost certainly recognizable to their peers. While I did assure interviewees that I would not share their interview transcript with other league members, or attribute their data directly to them, I emphasized how I could not guarantee the complete anonymity of their responses.

The sensitivity of being an 'ethical friend' (Taylor J, 2011, see also Browne, 2003) was necessary to judge how and if to include individual instances of personal or potentially hurtful material. In the daily work of participant observation too, interactions often blurred the line between talk that was evidently appropriate research material (e.g. discussion of potential new logo designs) and that which was potentially hurtful (e.g. disparaging remarks about individuals' new logo proposals). In these cases I erred on the side of caution, excluding material that could potentially cause harm if reproduced out of context. Similarly, I shared thesis chapters and journal articles in their draft stages with the participants featured therein, providing opportunities for their suggestion of additions, changes and omissions. While some participants clarified their earlier statements to more precisely convey their intended meanings, others took the opportunity to exert a broader influence. For example,

Pauline Baynes responded, 'you're not going to compare derby to burlesque are you? I hate it when people do that.'

Semi-structured schedules and a topic list of prompts for each interview facilitated interviewees' ability to direct the conversation to matters of importance to them, whilst being guided by my own research agenda. Interviewing friends and acquaintances had the methodologically useful effect of being able to continue previous conversations in greater depth and with slightly more formality. During interviews shared experiences were drawn on as both participants and myself explored their meaning and developed interpretations in conversation. Interviews were not necessarily or always a case of asking participants to share or tell their pre-formed opinions or existing narratives of their experience, but rather were often moments when interpretation and understanding were brought into being (Davies & Davies, 2007). Talking about familiar places, issues, people and events was one way that my own prior belonging was mobilized in discrete moments of data generation.

My implication in the research context also came to the fore in interviews, as did my position in implicit hierarchies in the league as an 'experienced' skater. On more than one occasion the roles of interviewer/interviewee somewhat blurred as participants asked me 'so wait, how did the league begin?' and 'what was it like back then?' In these and other instances there is a higher than usual degree of explicitness with which we are both, 'researcher' and 'researched', implicated in the construction of accounts of what roller derby is. While, for instance, I knew that there was a meeting in 2010 where the league collectively decided to be competitive, I did not however already know the various meanings of this and other instances for skaters, as participants' interpretations shifted over time and often developed different meanings in retrospect. Looking back, and the construction of shared narratives of the league's recent history were however, central to the research focus on changes associated with seriousness, and shifts in roller derby's gendered relation to a broader field of sport.

Formal interviews were additional to more informal, and almost daily, discussion of roller derby. The boundaries between informal conversations and research interviews

were often hazy. On occasion I would ask a question, without any research intention, only to be asked in return ‘is this an interview then?’ Clearly interaction could have the feel of research for ‘participants’ even if I did not intend to be ‘interviewing’. The particular character of interviewing in a familiar context was one motivation for developing a three-month participatory film-making project as a third strand of data generation. The film-making project was designed to play to the strengths of my embedded yet shifting position and to contrive a series of purposeful interactions explicitly ‘for research’ that elaborated upon skaters’ everyday concerns with the question of how to articulate and represent roller derby and their league.

3.3 Creative & Collaborative Methods

Participatory film-making as method was developed in response to the challenges of generating data in a context of shifting belonging, and to the evolution of the research questions. The essence of the film-making project was setting participants the task of working together to design and produce a film about roller derby, the league and themselves in a series of structured workshops taking place over a three month period from September to December 2011. The strength and appropriateness of generating empirical material in this way lies mainly in that it is a contrived-for-research exercise that reproduces, stimulates and develops participants' creative and collaborative engagements with what roller derby is and how to represent it, particularly at a time when ‘getting taken seriously’ was at the forefront of skaters representational practices.

'Ethnographic film' and 'collaborative methods' both have long established, and not unproblematic, precedents (Pink, 2004: 5). Participatory film-making in particular has often been uncritically eulogized as somewhat of a 'solution' to the problems of colonial, masculinist or Cartesian models of social research (Banks, 2001: 3; Mitchell, 2011: 93). Despite fashions for 'visual' and 'participatory' research these terms are insufficient to fully describe the film-making project and the empirical materials produced therein. What matters more than the labels it is possible to attach to such methods is the relation between film-making as method and data generated, possibilities for analysis in response to research questions, and accompanying ethical and epistemological issues.

Prior to film-making, participants were already engaged with making representations of roller derby, for example, discussing and designing promotional posters and bout programmes, as well as spontaneously evaluating and criticizing other representations of roller derby. Participants are familiar with and expert at making and interpreting a range of artifacts, including; uploading, tagging and commenting on Facebook photographs of themselves and others playing roller derby; watching video footage of their own bouts; introducing showings of *Whip It!* (2010) at local cinemas; and having practices and bouts filmed by fans and local film-studies college students. In this context a film-making project provided another venue for these practices but with a strategic view to generating empirical material (Mitchell, 2011: 71, Grasseni, 2004: 22). Film-making as method thus complimented participant observation and interviews, synthesizing both the 'spontaneous' and 'contrived' elements of ethnographic research.

Gauntlett suggests that participatory film-making projects, similar to interviews, surveys and other methods, can suffer from 'participants' well-meaning tendency to fill the time by doing what they think is expected of them' (2007: 100). The continuity between workshop activities and the stuff of participants' daily lives reduced such a dynamic. Moreover, the workshops took place in a context in which skaters were almost universally dissatisfied with films, books and articles that were produced by non-skaters, which were overwhelmingly understood as not taking the sport seriously. For example, in her interview Pauline Baynes describes a college film-crew coming to practice:

> One thing in particular that annoyed us was one of the groups came up and went 'can you scream into the camera?' and it was like they were trying to make us really aggressive and stuff and trying to put that kind of image across and that really annoyed us because that's totally like what might of happened five years ago, it's totally just annoying... it done my head in… I didn't want to do it, it was just really stereotypically annoying.
>
> Pauline Baynes, individual interview, October 2010

In these circumstances the structured opportunity for skaters to self-produce filmic representations of roller derby was a particularly apt research intervention (Gauntlett, 2007: 95; Mitchell, 2011: 90).

Moreover, the league is a context of heightened reflexivity in which participants spend a great deal of time self-watching and reflecting on the images and impressions they produce. Roller derby itself is a creative, collaborative and sometimes critical project. More than simply replicating the practices that skaters are engaged in anyway, the workshops were a structured environment that developed, concentrated and mediated such practices and thus generated appropriate and useful data. The film-making project facilitated skaters spending '*time* applying their playful or creative *attention* to the act of *making* something symbolic or metaphorical, and then *reflecting* on it' (Gauntlett, 2007: 3, emphasis original).

The workshops were open to all league members and designed so that participants could drop in to one or more sessions. After initial consultation with the Board I publicized the workshops to the entire league via word of mouth, the forum and email. Attendance at each workshop ranged from two to twelve participants but planning sessions typically involved around five skaters (a full breakdown is given in appendix v). The first five workshops took place in university teaching rooms and were dedicated to pre-production activities (example workshop plans in appendix vi), in which a series of facilitated tasks prompted decisions on; who the film should be aimed at; its genre, rationale and intended effects; the themes and structure of the final product; and detailed plans for what to film and how, including the creation of story boards and scripts.

The first two workshops were dedicated to 'Ideas & Brainstorming' and included; writing initial ideas on sticky notes (figure 3.1); discussing how roller derby is represented in existing newspaper articles, film documentaries and books (figures 3.2-3.4); and group discussion on key events in the league's past and plans for the future. All pre-production workshops were audio and video recorded and transcribed, and each session was drawn to a close by participants making lists of key issues and decisions to be carried over as starting points for each subsequent workshop (figures

3.5-3.6). With these materials I compiled 'minutes' from each session, which I circulated to participants and to the league as a whole (example in appendix vii).

Participants worked in small groups and pairs to develop initial ideas and define them in increasingly firm and fine detail, successively refining broad themes into storyboards (figures 3.7-3.12), scripts and plans for filming. I then worked with participants in smaller groups in order to get familiar with the recording equipment. In these sessions I demonstrated the camcorder's primary functions to one participant, who then explained to the next participant and so on, so that each participant took a turn at being both tutor and tutee (figures 3.13-3.14). Participants then took turns interviewing each other on camera so as to get a feel for both roles, and to practice filming.

Figure 3.1 Brainstorming Ideas September 2011.

Figure 3.2 Looking at Media Representations September 2011. Clockwise from bottom left: EB, VF, RG, MP, SDP, MF, KR.

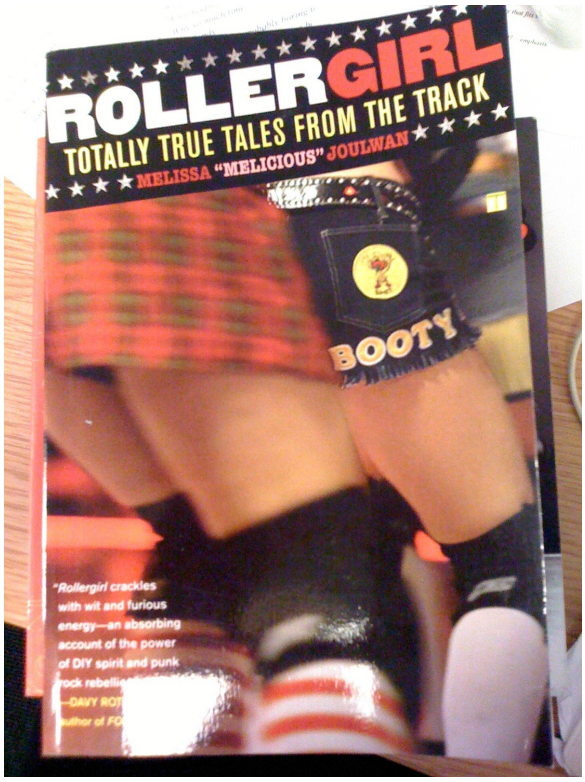


Figure 3.3, Rollergirl: Totally True Tales from the Track.

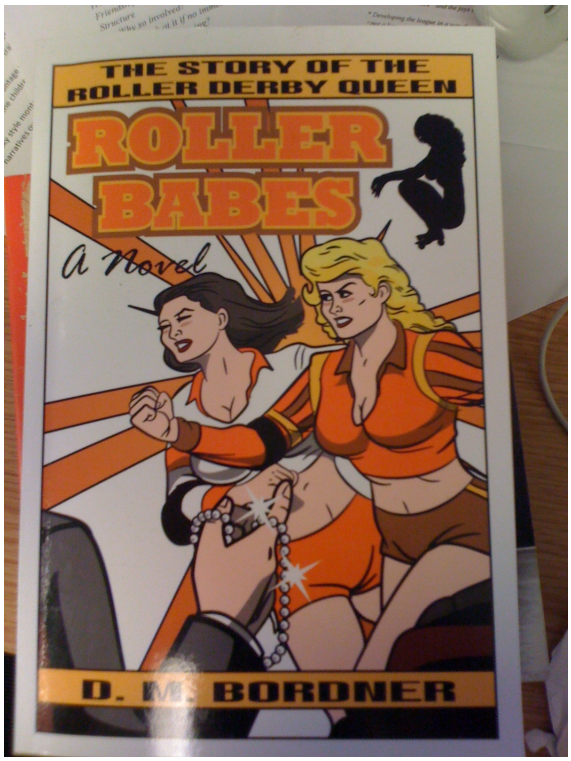


Figure 3.4 Roller Babes, A Novel.

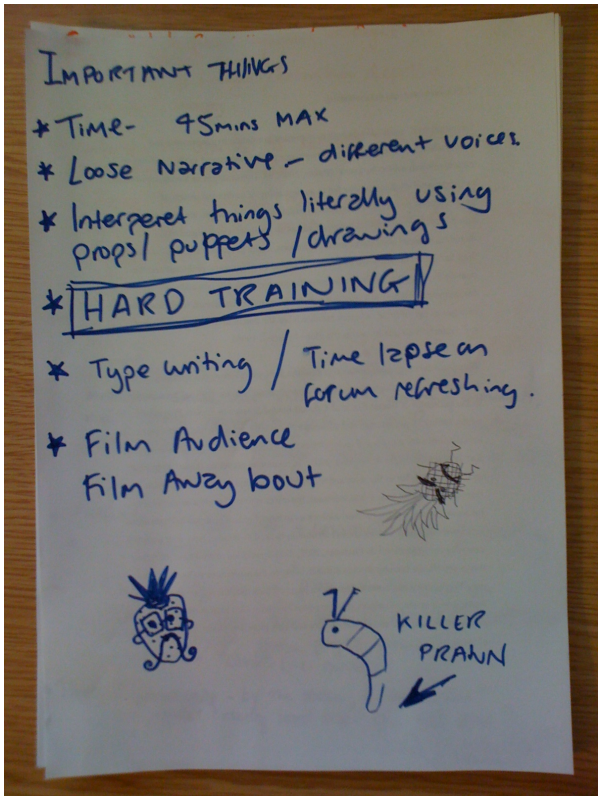


Figure 3.5 'What do people in the next workshop need to know?' September 2011.

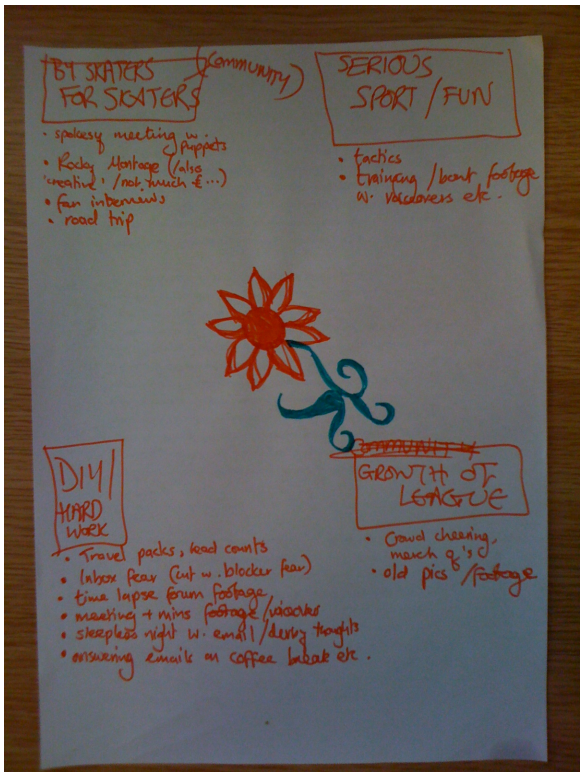


Figure 3.6 'What do people in the next workshop need to know?' September 2011.

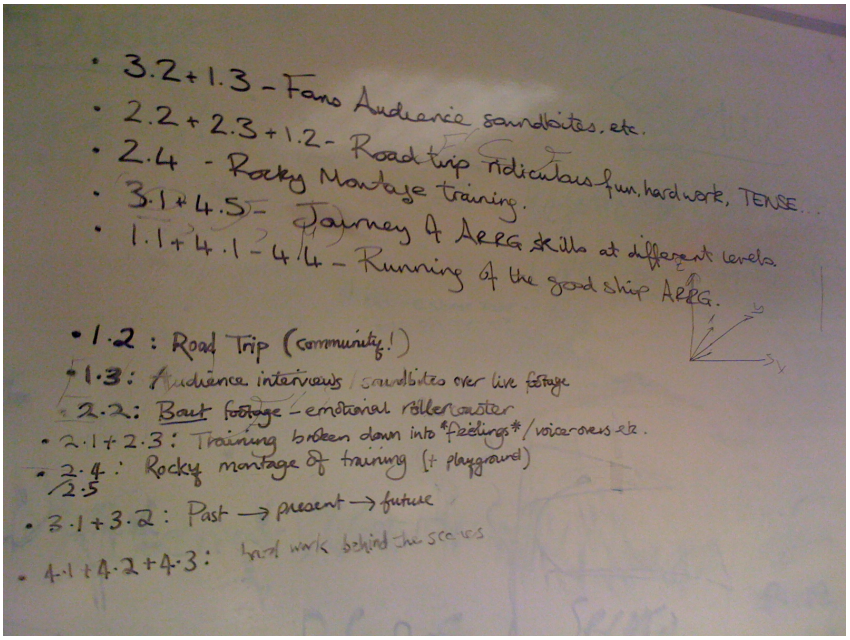


Figure 3.7 Ordering Themes September 2011.

Figure 3.8 Drawing Storyboards September 2011.
L-R, MP, RG, JE.

Figure 3.9 Drawing Storyboards September 2011 KR.

Figure 3.10 Drawing Storyboards September 2011 MF.

Figure 3.11 Getting a Sense of the Whole October 2011 EY, KG.

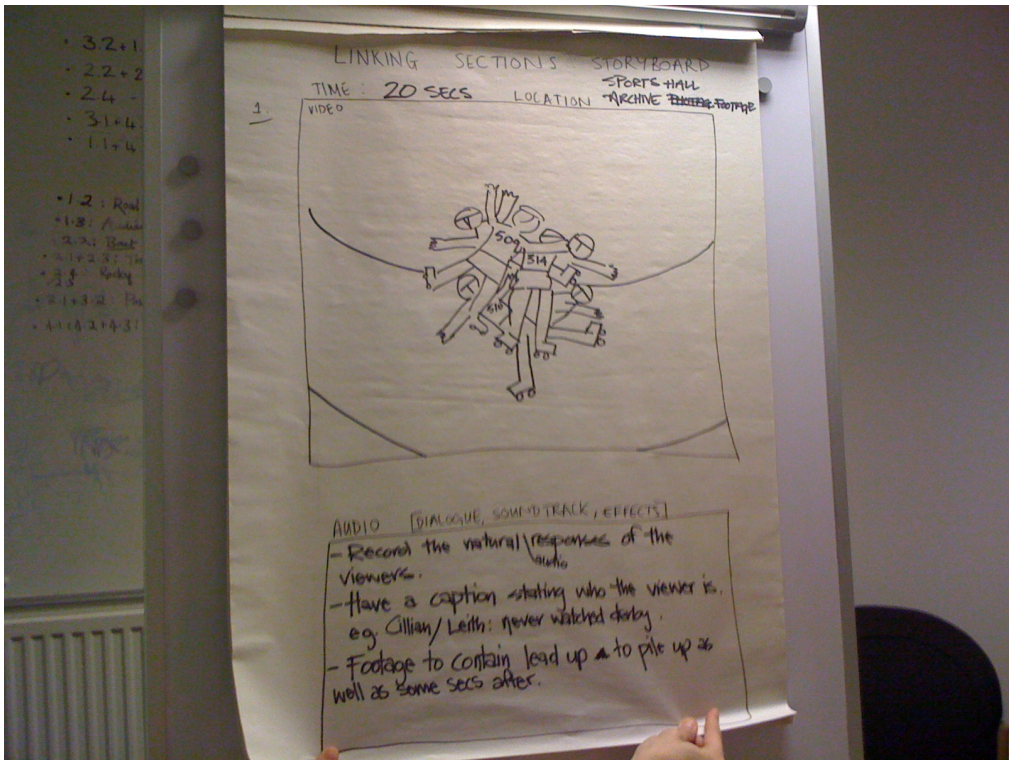


Figure 3.12 Linking Sections October 2011.

Figure 3.13 Equipment October 2011, EY.

Figure 3.14 Equipment October 2011 SS.

In late October participants took to the field, and began to shoot initial material. I Pee and TT filmed a series of interviews with a variety of skaters from the league, in their homes, work-places, in bars, and before and after practice. XD and SS travelled with the 'B' team to an away-game in Leeds, filming the journey from its start at 6am in the morning, to its conclusion at midnight when the coach returned. RB, Tiny Chancer and Sally Tape arranged to film a segment of 'sock puppets' representing skaters at committee meetings, although the practical constraints of time meant that this session has not, as yet, taken place.

At the time of writing however, the film-making project has stalled in the editing phase, primarily due to time constraints and the logistics of getting all participants in a room with editing software. I still see the eventual production of the film as key future outcome of the research, but in the knowledge that seeing the project through to completion requires more time, energy and resources that I could muster during the PhD. The commitment to eventually completing a film stems from an ethical obligation to produce something for and with participants, rather than from any analytical imperative. However, the success of the film-making project lies in the

generation of useful and appropriate empirical material. The data generated in the process of the workshops, and most notably the audio transcripts of the pre-production workshops, are exceedingly appropriate for analysis in response to the research questions. Workshop transcripts were manually coded and thematically analyzed, and provided a wealth of material regarding how participants conceptualized, together and in practice, what roller derby is and how to best represent it.

The materials generated in the workshops are thus more diverse than one final, yet-to-be-realized, film and include both 'primary' and 'production' artifacts (Mitchell, 2011: 4-5, 79-85). The workshop activities capitalized on a context of dissatisfaction among skaters with existing representations of roller derby that tend towards sensationally gendered portrayals of an 'alternative' or 'underground' subcultural activity (e.g. Schweitzer-Thompson, 2010). The storyboards, cartoons, illustrated notes and diagrams produced during the design process, the email discussions between sessions, the photographs and film I took during workshops, and the old photographs, fliers and posters that participants suggested should feature in the film are mobilized and generated in this context. The production of storyboards, for example, were a method of stimulating broader discussion, itself recorded, transcribed and analyzed.

The film-making project was thus a question of creative practice as mode of inquiry (Mitchell, 2011: 4). The focus of the method was on the processes that participants engaged in to make a film together (Gauntlett, 2007: 109). Data was generated via my initiating, documenting and analyzing the creative processes. Moving and still images generated in the workshops were not intended to be analytically central; the most analytically useful empirical material was generated in the processes of their production. The rationale for the workshops followed Grasseni's location of the strength of film-making as method in the ability to foreground how 'communities of practitioners come to share a perception of what they deem as reality' (2004: 29, see also Gauntlett, 2007). The group process of working towards a more or less consensually acceptable representation of shared perceptions of actuality was the central strength of film-making as method.

While in interviews, researchers often ‘expect people to explain immediately, in words, things which are difficult to explain immediately in words’ (Gauntlett, 2007: 3) film-making can bring with it the imperative to film only that which is filmable. Participants' responded imaginatively to the challenge of filming more intangible aspects of their experience, and suggested the use of animations, sub-titles, layered audio tracks and considered both 'magical realism' and 'musical theatre' as genres (workshop, September 2011). Discussion was enlivened by, for example, the 'impossibility' of representing women on film in a non-objectified way (workshop, September 2011).

Similarly, film-making raises additional ethical issues, particularly with regard to anonymity and confidentiality. The group-based character of the workshops meant that the discussions and interactions they involved were not anonymous or confidential; rather they had more of a public character. Workshop participants gave aural consent at the start of each session for the audio and video recording of proceedings, and for the products and proceedings of each session to be shared with the league and used for research. Prior to filming, participants decided to ask permission for filming in the semi-private space of bouts, but not for filming in public or open spaces. Milne (2012) emphasizes the importance of allowing for the possibility for participants to 'say no’ to participatory video, and for collaborative film-making not to be conceptualized as inevitably emancipatory. In this instance participants did, in a way, 'say no' when fatigued by the demands of attending workshops and the difficulties of organizing filming and editing, skaters could simply choose to not join in, to not attend workshops.

The film-making project can be described as a 'full participatory context' (Mitchell, 2011: 5). Despite the methodological importance of the participatory elements of the project, it was not intended as an emancipatory 'fix' for the problems of researching ‘at home’. Instead, film-making was a different use of my position, embedded in the transition from 'insider' to 'outsider' my role in the project became less about 'participating' and more about mediating and facilitating the group process. I was not fully participant, but nor was I a distanced or expert researcher. This tallies with Grasseni’s suggestion that video-making can function as a 'catalyst of the

ethnographer's attention and as a tool for self-distancing from familiar or generic ways of framing ethnographic objects.' (2004: 17).

In this process- and practice-focused sense the workshops were not about accessing some underlying reality, in the way suggested when Gauntlett proposes prompting 'some of the ideas which "simmer below the threshold of consciousness" to surface in the creative work' (2007: 23). I don't think this formulation is quite right. Rather than *revealing* meaning, the creative process of the workshops was precisely about creating, generating and making meanings. I think Gauntlett is closer to the mark when he suggests that film-making as method is about 'advancing a proposition' (ibid: 20); a chance for participants to make a series of collaboratively generated statements, and to establish an actuality, in the course of negotiating its representation. The film-making project thus posed the question of how to make a representation of roller derby. In their responses participants articulated their changing understandings of what roller derby is, and experimented with a range of, predictable and surprising, techniques for constructing roller derby as a 'real, serious sport'.

As the research questions increasingly prioritized *change* in participants' practice, my 'pre-research' belonging took on new significance as potential data. In tandem with the way that skaters reflected upon the league's short history, both in interviews and more spontaneously, my involvement in the league's early years became a key resource in understanding differences between, and the transition from 'then' to 'now' (see Chapters 4 and 5). Two methodological challenges arose, firstly how to reliably remember, and make appropriate use of such remembering, and secondly how to, ethically and methodologically, put my recollections to use.

The first challenge was remediated by a veritable on-line archive of email conversations and forum discussions that had thankfully never been deleted. Re-reading and coding these textual exchanges provided invaluable verification for remembered occurrences. Once I started to compose accounts of past events clustered around themes of organizational change, self-representation and seriousness I began to share these drafts with skaters. This process both facilitated participants' engagement with my research writing and allowed individuals to verify,

and elaborate upon my recollections. Such dissemination also provided the occasion for me to seek consent to use my accounts of 'pre-research' interactions and events for research purposes. After informally sharing draft pieces with the skaters involved I began to write a blog, where I posted both accounts of the league's beginnings and more recent research-related writing (Breeze, 2013a). The functionality of a blog, allowing readers, to comment directly on each piece, was particularly useful. My sharing of accounts drew on and initiated fresh rounds of the reflexive sense-making of the past that became to central to Chapter 4.

The length of my involvement in the league, and the length of the research, meant that discussions of the recent part could be mobilized into a core component of the methodology. In May 2013 the league's Fundraising & Events committee asked me to give a short ‘speech’ about the league's beginnings at the gig to celebrate the league's fifth birthday. I had come to occupy the position of 'old hand', someone who although now 'just a researcher' was an expert on the past. Alongside blogging activities such a position is bound up with the normalization of the research; research activities are worked into the on-going construction of narratives about what the league used to be like and what it became.

In a further attempt to share research output in a meaningful and accessible way I made zines, self-published magazines, containing selected transcript extracts from research interviews. This activity took place alongside 'writing up' in the first four months of 2013. The process of compiling the zines included working closely with interviewees to select sections of transcript for ‘publication’. Each featured interviewee also wrote a short introduction to 'their' zine, which included their reflections on reading back over transcripts, which in some instances were a record of conversations from twelve or even eighteen months previously. I see the zines as a way to continue to engage with participants through the research processes and products, and as a tool for disseminating research ‘outputs’ to those most involved and implicated in its construction that will continue alongside more traditional peer reviewed publication.

3.4 Introducing the Interludes

In this section I return to 'getting taken seriously', as a substantive analytical theme that has implications for questions of methodology. As the league and the research co-evolved, epistemological and substantive concerns began to converge. In what follows I situate and discuss the rationale for the interludes that occur between Chapters 4 to 7 and that trace connections between; doing 'insider' research; feeling and affect in research; methods as techniques of seriousness; and the possibility of non-/serious research. The interludes are thus an experiment in writing research, that begin to respond to, a 'ghost question' that haunts the thesis; *how does doing research relate to getting taken seriously?*

As participants became increasingly preoccupied with 'getting taken seriously' it became harder and harder to ignore that PhD research is also, in part, an exercise in pursuit of serious recognition. As an initiation into the profession of sociology, completing a doctorate can be productively thought of an exercise in getting taken seriously. Research accounts have been crafted with a view to persuading significant others (supervisors, fellow students, peer reviewers, external examiners, conference organizers and attendees, publishers, future employees) that my work is legitimate *and valid;* that it should be recognized and taken seriously. The research thus becomes an exemplary site for experimenting with symmetry and with methodological allegory (Law, 2004). Exploring relations between research practice and the thesis' substantive analytical concerns allows the research to 'say something' not only about seriousness in an emergent, women-led, DIY sport, but also about the character of sociology as a discipline.

Techniques for establishing 'seriousness' in academic work range from the practical (referencing, style, formatting) through the use of evidence to make arguments to the subject and form of research itself. It is imperative to recognize, however, that academia is not automatically or homogenously 'seriousness'. Many traditions have actively if implicitly engaged with seriousness. For example feminist research and activism have prioritized spheres of domesticity, intimate relationships, and the 'lived experience' of women in a variety of socio-cultural locations, all of which follows a commitment to the blurring of dichotomous understandings of 'the

personal' and 'the political'. In effect, arguing that 'women's issues' should be *taken seriously*. Alternatively, one way for research to pursue serious recognition is to ensure continuity with inherited traditions; that it fits with the majority of readers' expectations and assumptions, at least in form if not in subject (Halberstam, 2011: 6). Conversely, departing from and arguing against established bodies of knowledge, 'exposing' prior consensuses as false, incomplete or erroneous assumptions or re-presenting familiar subjects in a new light are also common approaches to producing 'serious' research (Kuhn, 1996; Latour, 1993, 2010).

Such an approach accords with Latour's conceptualization of modern critique as 'de-bunking', as lifting 'the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers' (2004: 246). Relations between critical de-bunking and naïve belief, and between taking, and not taking seriously, are further articulated in debate between Viveiros de Castro (2011) and Candea (2011). Questions of what is taken seriously and how imply both notions of dis/belief and researcher positionality. In particularly de Castro argues against a 'hermeneutics of suspicion, so typical of critical sociology, which seeks the (always nasty) truth behind the lies that are told within and by society' (2011: 145). Candea responds to and complicates de Castro's suggestion that 'almost all of the things that we must *not* take seriously are near to or inside of us' (2011: 133):

> …while defining the discipline by opposition to "where we start from" is crucial, such a definition too easily leads us to assume we know where that is… [anthropology is] the commitment to taking seriously the multiplicities internal to what we thought was simply "us", instead of either taking these worlds for granted or subjecting them to the usual critical unveiling. (Candea, 2011: 150)

The question of what to take seriously, and how, thus becomes of the character of critique, a question of what can be known and how. Considering the points at which the substantive and epistemological facets of the research converge, around seriousness and getting taken seriously inspires the development of what Law (2004) as proposed as methodological allegory.

I use allegory fairly straightforwardly, in the sense that is familiar from Aesop's fables, religious parables, and moralizing children's stories alike. The interludes tell

a story about doing research that is also a story about roller derby and seriousness; the narratives 'say something' about the substantive and analytical outcomes of the research through an account of the research process. The interludes thus experiment in applying 'the art of meaning something other and more than what is being said' (Law, 2004: 88).

To this end the interludes occur after each of the following chapters. The interludes function as pores, openings, cross-roads and thresh-holds which open up interstices between chapters to inquire as to the relations between 'seriousness' and research practice, and as to the possibility of non-/serious research. The interludes thus pursue two aims, firstly, to contribute to methodological debates, around 'insider' research and about feeling and affect in research practice; and secondly to develop the idea of allegory as method. The interludes hybridize *confessing* the 'mess' (Law, 2003a, 2004) of research methods and experiment in subjecting the research process to the same analytical scrutiny as its products. The interludes make a series of cumulative statements; that research can be thought of as serious because it is work; because it is rational-intellectual; and because it is about producing representations that assume some congruence between saying and meaning. The final interlude presents an ambivalently tongue-in-cheek manifesto for research that does not necessarily or always take itself seriously.

This chapter has demonstrated how participant observation, interviews and a collaborative film-making project form a continuum of ethnographic methods, embedded in my prior and shifting belonging to the league. This is a particularly strong configuration of qualitative methods, arising as it does in response to shifts in the research questions, the research context and my relation to the league alike. The empirical material generated in this strategic combination of methods is exceedingly amenable to thematic analysis and the crafting of thick, multi-layered analytical descriptions of how participants negotiate seriousness in practice, and how or if in

pursuing serious recognition did the league become what it was initially defined in opposition to.

Throughout this discussion I have demonstrated how an 'insider' position is dynamic rather than static; a relational role that can and does shift over the course of the research. It has been my contention to show that 'insiderness' does not necessarily secure access to a mythical realm of automatically ‘authentic’ or unproblematically ‘ethical’ knowledge. Nor does it preclude the achievement of sufficiently 'objective' distance or 'unbiased' understanding. Both these conceits rest upon ontological and epistemological assumptions that this research simply does not share. Instead, I suggest that beginning from familiarity is a strong position from which to develop experiments in methodological allegory that weave in and out in between the more usual presentation and analysis of empirical material.

4. 'How weird it was back in the day': Making Sense of the League's Beginnings

FIGURE 4.1 THE TEAM[4] IN PREPARATION FOR THEIR FIRST EVER BOUT NOVEMBER 2008. COURTESY OF ARRG.

...and that's why roller derby is so weird because in no other sport would you have a meeting where you said, "should we try and win?"

Pauline Baynes, individual interview October 2010.

Participants' understandings of what roller derby is 'now' were very often articulated in contrast to 'then'; the league's recent past and roller derby's short history. In her interview, Pauline Baynes referred to a league-wide meeting held in 2009, arranged

[4] L-R top row; Swamp Monster; Lily Lethal; Crazylegs; Daisy Disease [MB]; Anarchick; Switchblade Jade; Mad Mim. L-R bottom row; Madame de Stompadour; Zillah; Juicy Lucy; Candy Savage; Moxie Emerald.

specifically to debate whether to join the Women's Flat Track Derby Association's (WFTDA) apprentice programme, newly opened to teams outside the USA. This first question bought with it a second, whether or not to prioritize playing competitively. I can remember being at this meeting and, although it feels naïve to say it now, for me it was characterized by a real sense of possibility. It felt like the league didn't necessarily have to follow existing scripts about 'sport'. At this point the value of *competition* was not taken-for-granted, it was an explicit object of discussion and collaborative decision-making. Roller derby was 'so weird' because assumptions about what it meant to play a sport were questioned. The league's relation to enshrined sporting values, trying to win, were seemingly up for grabs.

Reminiscing and reflecting upon the early days of the league was a common occurrence in interviews and workshops, and a frequent topic in participants' everyday talk. Anecdotes drawn from the league's recent past were frequently punctuated with laughter as skaters express disbelief that things were apparently so different and that *what it used to be like* becomes so 'weird', in hindsight. Despite the pleasures found in looking back over the league's short history, participants were invested in establishing and maintaining distinctions between 'then' and 'now'. It is not exactly that skaters were ashamed of the league's history or their own previous words and actions, but there does seem to be something of a narcissistic circuit of revisionism at play; as what roller derby and the league *are* was re-evaluated and defined in contrast to *what it used to be like*. The league did collectively decide to apply to join the WFTDA and to play competitively, to try and win games.

Of course generating data and writing ethnography are also exercises in giving an account of the league's short history, and therefore were similarly fraught with the danger of narrating the past as if it inexorably led to the present. A central component of the chapter is thus discussion of how the accounts I give are implicated the construction of revisionist narratives. Rather than provide a simple story of 'what it used to be like', observable changes are situated in relation to participants' post-hoc re-interpretations of the same.

In what follows I integrate ethnographic material from my own involvement in the league's first two years with participants' reflections on roller derby's recent past, to

give an account of both the league's initial character and of how this was later reinterpreted. In doing so I focus on how participants established distinctions between 'then' and 'now', and specifically on changes in firstly, relations to broader conceptions of 'sport'; secondly, gender dynamics and gendered representations; and thirdly, do-it-yourself (DIY) organization. The fourth section of the chapter is concerned with the construction of narratives; how moments such as the meeting in which the league 'decided to be competitive' became fateful events and were used to justify and contest present and future action. *Getting taken seriously* became the prism through which roller derby's short history and the league's recent past were refracted as participants made sense of what roller derby *is, could* or *should be* in relation to what it *was*. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the relations between participants' retrospectives, getting taken seriously, and the specificity of roller derby as a *DIY, women's* sport.

4.1 In Relation to Sport

Participants' accounts of their motivations for joining the league very often turn on the idea that roller derby is significantly different from, critical of or oppositional to other forms of sport. DIY organization and status as a *women's sport* are central to such accounts, as are those practices previously interpreted as occasions for gender subversion/conformity, especially derby names and practices of dress (Chapter 2). However, notions that roller derby is significantly different from sport are soon positioned in the past and increasing concerns with roller derby's being and becoming a real, legitimate sport crystalize around shifting understandings of derby names and of wearing, and not wearing, fishnet tights.

Descriptions of encountering roller derby for the first time echo the disbanded claim that roller derby is 'like a sport for women who don't like sport', and articulate it as a context where people without a sports background, or who had perhaps previously felt excluded from sport, were welcome and celebrated. For instance, when Orville recalls joining the league in May 2009 she paints a picture of gleefully liberated sports rejects:

> We were like "woah this is cool, it's like all the misfits from like gym

> class, together" it was quite like what we were like high-school, you know there was quite a lot of fat people in small clothes and jumping around and just being a bit free and we thought "this is quite cool"… we kind of said "yeah you know we might fit in with that kind of sporting environment"
>
> - Orville, individual interview, June 2011

In Orville's recollection the gym-class misfits, and the freely-jumping 'fat people in small clothes' come to represent an environment that was different enough from other forms of sport that Orville felt that she might 'fit in'.

Orville's account evokes a sense of solidarity with gym-class misfits, and a celebration of the inclusion of people, and fat bodies, not usually understood as compatible with 'sport'. Similarly, AY describes watching a bout for the first time, seeing The Beefcake and Iona Rover, and feeling inspired because 'they're really strong players and they're also not skinny and small, you know… so I think it was the whole thing of well, they kind of look like me' (individual interview, May 2011). Vagina Dentata elaborates:

> I've always found it really hard to find sports or activities that I can do being like a bigger girl and I do find like, a lot of people, if I say "Oh I go to the gym" they're like "Really? Do you really?" My doctor said that to me one time, and finding something like derby, it is something I can actually excel at being a bigger person… it's a sport where my size is an advantage instead of a disadvantage I think that's quite good as well so it makes me want to be better at it and get more into it…
>
> - Vagina Dentata, group interview, May 2011

Roller derby here is significantly different from other forms of sport because of who does it; people who wouldn't ordinarily take part in, or who aren't stereotypically imagined to be involved in, sport. All interviewees talked of roller derby and/or the league as 'welcoming', 'open' or 'inclusive' in comparison to established sports practices. In eleven of the total 26 interviews participants spontaneously labeled themselves as 'not really sporty', as not having a 'sporting background', or as not really liking sport:

> I'm really not sporty, and organized sport in general that's another thing

> I, I think I'd like to come back to, I have a lot of issues with it, but they weren't things that I saw in [league] at all.
>
> - Kathy Hacker, individual interview, October 2010

Participants distinguish between roller derby and 'sport' in general; roller derby is different enough to appeal to those who are ambivalent about playing sport and being sporty. Participants made other distinctions too. For example, Kathy described how roller derby appealed to her by virtue of it not being 'commercialized' and because the league didn't enshrine the value of competition above all else. For myself I remember waxing lyrical about how 'it doesn't matter what you look like' and 'it doesn't matter how good you are'. All of these features are revisited in this, and subsequent chapters, especially in Chapter 5 where changes in *who* roller derby is *for* are the main focus.

However, two intertwined features are especially central here; DIY organization and roller derby as a women's sport *sui generis*:

> I remember hearing about somebody [a man] saying that they were the manager of a roller derby team and I just remember hitting the roof! I was just like, "no, just no" roller girls manage themselves… there's nothing that needs to be outsourced when you have upwards of fifty women getting together and taking part in something, there's really no need when you've go this massive wide set of skills. I think that's massively important and I guess there's not a lot of sports that work like that, again I can't think of any, you know football teams have managers, and you do think of this guy, and it's always a man, and he's always got a horrible shell-suit on like anxiously chewing gum and taking all the flak for the decisions that they've made, and it's like well we make our own decisions you know… I think its important that it was a women's sport first, and that at the moment women are the main event, we're the skaters the owners, the organizers, the everything, apart from like the men that are involved, but you know we're the main people in roller derby and I think it's about time something came along that wasn't like the women's version of some well-funded, well-advertised shiny, happy men's sport you know.
>
> - Tiny Chancer, individual interview, October 2010

These characteristics, self-organization, development outwith existing sports organizations, and initially at least, as played exclusively and organized almost entirely by women, are interpreted as particularly conducive to reconfigurations of both gender and sport (Chapter 2).

Similarly, when participants cite the appeal of taking on a derby name, wearing make-up, fishnet tights and hot-pants, they echo the overwhelming focus of previous research, where these practices are interpreted as occasions for gender subversion/conformity. BBT, who does identify as 'sporty' recalled watching a bout for the first time and drew a contrast, based on the ways skaters dress, to her other sports experience:

> I've played sports my whole life but never one that you could wear hot-pants and fishnets and wear make-up and you know, great! Yeah so I, that was quite impressive… I like that about roller derby a lot, I mean every sport has its look and its uniform, but I don't know, it [roller derby] looked fun, you know you kinda got to play dress up as well as play a sport and, yeah, I don't know it's just they looked so cool, the girls, and it was definitely a case of like "oh I wanna be one of those girls, I wanna look like them, I wanna play like that" so yeah…
>
> - BBT, individual interview, May 2011

As BBT relates her first impressions of roller derby to her sports background, roller derby compares favorably by virtue of 'being able to play dress up as well as play a sport'. Kathy Hacker similarly espoused how, when she first joined the league 'it was a joy to get my old fishnets out of the cupboard'. Opportunities to 'play with my image' and 'express different elements of yourself' (individual interview, October 2010) thus typified both the appeal of roller derby and its difference from 'sport'.

Focusing specifically on derby names and the frequency of references to 'fishnets' in participants' accounts I now turn to how skaters retrospectively re-interpret what roller derby is, or rather was, as they reconfigure both a relation to 'sport' and their own understandings of what this relation could or should be.

Change, at multiple levels, is explicit as The Beefcake considers derby names specifically in comparison to other forms of sport:

> I think my opinion's changing, right now as we speak… I guess my opinion on it, I think, is that if the sport's gonna get to the more mainstream place, then I think it would be fine to not make such a big deal out of it… so in my head it would be like you didn't have to take a derby name, you didn't have to call yourself by a derby name, but you might have a nick-name, like they do it in a lot of sports you know, it would be quite good, or I think it would be quite good if it kind of went that way, because, I love some of the names that people come up with, I think they're really, really, really inspired, but to people outside viewing it, it might take a bit of the focus off it being a sport rather than entertainment I suppose… and it comes back to that argument about whether it should be seen as, you know is it a sport, is it entertainment, is it like, you know we are playing the sport, we're playing it properly, we're not hamming it up, like they used to, and to me some of the old, you know like sexy outfits and [derby] names kind of fits in with how we used to play it rather than how its developing…
>
> -The Beefcake, individual interview, October 2010

Both The Beefcake's opinion and roller derby itself are changing in this account 'right now as we speak'. In the moment of her interview The Beefcake positioned what she might once have thought in the past, as something she is beginning to disagree with; she knows better now, or perhaps she was previously mistaken. The Beefcake articulated an emergent view of derby names as interrupting a journey towards a 'more mainstream place' and disrupting serious recognition; perhaps it would be preferable if derby names became akin to the nick-names common in 'a lot of sports'. This moment of changing opinion is accompanied by a sense of longer-term change, in references to previous incarnations of roller derby, notorious for their spectacularly non-serious character. That 'we're not hamming it up, like they used to' is a move to locate contemporary roller derby as more authentically sporting in comparison to the, now disavowed, theatrical performances of the past.

Moreover, The Beefcake spoke to the perspectives of 'people outside' of roller derby, derby names 'might take the focus off it being a sport'. A status of real, legitimate, serious sport is an object of struggle, to be achieved in interaction. In The Beefcake's account a difference from 'sport' is something that begins to belong to roller derby's past, 'how we used to play it rather than how it's developing'. Situated in a broader narrative of a progression towards 'sport', The Beefcake drew

distinctions, between a 'then' and a 'now' in roller derby and in her own opinions. Similar patterns are observable in Orville's account of practices of dress, where firstly, she identifies a typical individual trajectory and attributes it to other skaters:

> A lot of people who come into it, they start learning how to play, and they wear quite conservative stuff, and they play for a little while and they start wearing shorter shorts and louder socks and tights [laughs] and tighter t-shirts or whatever, but then they get better, and then maybe they make the team, and they bout for a little while and then maybe they start wearing like more conservative, more sporty stuff again and it's like a weird kind of development that people go through.
>
> - Orville, individual interview, June 2011

According to Orville, skaters end up wearing 'more sporty stuff' after progressing through a period of dressing in short shorts and colourful tights. Here change is attributed at the individual level, like The Beefcake's changing opinions, skaters move through stages of more or less 'sporty' forms of dress. Practices that could be interpreted as ambivalent or oppositional in relation to 'sport', and that are so regularly the centerpiece of existing research, are a phase in this development. Un-sporty practices of dress are positioned as temporary episodes on a journey that individual skaters go through on their way to more sports-like dress.

Orville went on to articulate her own rejection of 'fishnets' and 'underwear', in contrast to how they were 'originally seen'. These rejections were expressed not, as with The Beefcake, as a disavowal of her own previous opinions, but rather in terms of *disagreement with others* who apparently continue to value such supposedly un-sporty apparel. Orville makes distinctions not only between 'then' and 'now', but between people as well:

> I think like the whole image thing is a big, bone of contention within roller derby, and so I think for the people that very quickly started to take it seriously as a competitive sport the whole like "yeah we all have different names and er, wear underwear on track" thing [laughs] was just really irritating and it was like "we should be in the fucking sports pages"… because it quickly became, um, apparent that, it wasn't all about wearing fishnets

MB: Why did the fishnets thing even happen? Where did it come from?

I guess it's about the freedom of the sport and the DIY aspect of the sport and it's like it was maybe originally seen as a bit of a "fuck you" to the sporting world and any kind of authority that would say "you're not a sport" and it's like "we are a sport we can wear what the fuck we want" and I kind of get that, I get the attitude, but I don't like it personally, it doesn't sit very comfortably with me… It's just that's the constant thing that you hear isn't it? I, don't really have very much patience for it to be honest… It's like the fact that derby is somehow connected to burlesque, to me it's utterly horrific and I don't understand how that's ever happened, but I mean it's to do with the dress, I mean the way people dress and people who do burlesque, a lot of them do derby as well or they seem to feel that there's this common ground, this common link between the two and, I mean, no basically, no everyone [laughs] … I think it was definitely being promoted as that when I first started, as being for all shapes and sizes, you can wear what you want, you can wear fishnets if you want although why you would want to, it's a sport…

- Orville, individual interview, June 2011

Distinctions, between 'people that very quickly started to take it seriously as a competitive sport' and those who emphasize 'different names' and wearing 'underwear on track' emerge in Orville's account. Wearing fishnet tights was *originally seen* as being about an oppositional relation to 'sport', about disinterest in the classifications of 'authority'. There is a claim for sports status, 'we are a sport' but this claim intervenes in what it means to play a sport, particularly in conventions of dress, 'we can wear what the fuck we want'. Orville lost patience with these attitudes however, positioning understandings of roller derby as similar to burlesque as simply wrong. Those who argue for such commonalities become mistaken; 'why would you want to [wear fishnets] it's a sport'.

The long-term character of the research facilitated interviewees' engagements with their own previous understandings. The following extract comes from an interview that took place in the autumn of 2010:

I'd be lying if I said that I didn't lay my outfit out before the night of a bout, and you know I think about what I'm gonna look like when I'm skating but to me that's fun, it's the kind of fun that's part of an almost a

> kind of ritual thing, that I don't feel like I would get if I was wearing one of those gross mesh sporty vests and a big long pair of shorts, I mean don't get me wrong, people in derby can and do totally wear that stuff, it's just not me, I love to dress up and putting on this shinny ridiculous outfit, I'll dress up at any excuse to dress up in like, in elaborate clothing and be sort of, camp…
>
> - Tiny Chancer, individual interview, October 2010

There is an implicit contrast to other forms of sport here, in the fun Tiny Chancer imagines would be absent if she wore 'one of those gross mesh sporty vests', and roller derby, in a by-now very familiar, yet contested, formula is positioned as different because of opportunities to wear 'camp', 'shiny ridiculous outfits'.

In the first months of 2013 I worked with Tiny Chancer to make a zine featuring this extract from her interview transcript. The process involved her re-reading this record of our 2010 conversation, and writing a short passage introducing herself in the first pages of the zine. Tiny Chancer took the opportunity to draw attention to changes in roller derby:

> I think we take it for granted that it's a real, serious, athletic sport these days…

And to changes in what she wears and what she thinks about it:

> …we wear the mesh vests I swore were "just not me" and I love them!
>
> - Tiny Chancer, zine introduction, February 2013

In these reflections there is a sense of a growing consensus, that 'these days' it is possible for skaters, on the whole, to take for granted roller derby's status as a 'real, serious, athletic sport'. In 2013 the whole team do wear uniform shirts made of a mesh fabric, and Tiny Chancer expresses her love for them, in explicit contrast to her past rejection of such vests. As Tiny Chancer is presented with her transcript, she distances her present self from her past words, making it clear that her 2013 opinions are not necessarily the same as those she expressed and that I recorded in 2010. In Tiny Chancer's re-reading her opinions have changed, the details of how the team

dresses has changed, and taken for granted notions of what roller derby *is* have changed.

In mid 2013 Lady Garden told me about a scene in the changing rooms before a bout. She says that not only does 'everyone on the ['A' team] have an athletic body', but that 'people are standing around, pinching their bellies and complaining about how fat they are' and that this is done by 'all of the thinnest, most normal-bodied skaters' (field-notes, May 2012); freely-jumping gym-class misfits no longer. When participants' reflected back upon what the league used to be like, *some* markers of roller derby as distinct from sport are positioned in the past. Fishnets, rather than being lauded as indicating a significant difference from 'sport', become a phase on the way to more sports-like dress, or a hangover from a time when we didn't know any better. Participants variously narrated change in their own opinions and practices of dress according to individual trajectories, differences between people, distinctions between 'then' and 'now', or expressed how their views, what actually happens *and* rough consensuses on what roller derby *is* have all changed alongside each other.

However, while the 'ripped fishnets and exposed panties' (Carlson 2011, 86) that are so central to existing accounts of roller derby, were increasingly understood as incompatible with being-and-becoming a real, legitimate, serious sport, derby names (returned to in Chapter 7), DIY organization and a status as a women's sport are neither disavowed nor revised in exactly the same way. Roller derby's gender composition and the issue of recognition as a real, serious sport are intertwined, and roller derby is saturated with practices very often understood as being about gender. I now move on to consider changes in the ways that skaters produce and make sense of gendered representations of roller derby as a specifically women's sport just as men's participation in roller derby increases.

4.2 Gendered Representations

Roller derby being 'for women' is a celebrated and perhaps radical aspect of their sport for many skaters, 'it's about time something came along that wasn't like the women's version of some well-funded, well-advertised shiny, happy men's sport' (Tiny Chancer, individual interview, October 2010). A status as women's sport, and

'sexy outfits and derby names', is also however a central component in participants' accounts of why roller derby suffers from a lack of recognition as a real, serious sport:

> When I talk to people about roller derby, I'm sure they don't think about it as a sport at all, so I would like to see it shown on TV or in the newspapers as a sport with people looking like they're playing it as a sport, you know, a lot of blokes that I've met along the way, their immediate reaction is like "oh sexy ladies on skates"…
>
> - The Beefcake, individual interview, October 2010

> MB: Why do you think that it's quite common to hear people say like "that's not a real sport"?
>
> Like why people wouldn't recognize it as a sport you mean? [MB: yeah, yeah] yeah because there's no uniform, because there's no ball, *because there's no men*, because it's DIY, err, because you have to put things on your feet, I mean there's so many reasons…
>
> - Orville, individual interview, June 2011 (emphasis added)

Orville lists 'because there's no men' as one reason for a lack of sporting recognition, but there have always been men in roller derby. The majority of referee positions are filled by men, and in the first twelve months of the league, contra to Tiny Chancer's unequivocal assertion that 'roller girls manage themselves', a man, Cain Unstable, acted as our 'coach' (see 4.3 DIY Organization). Moreover, writing in 2013 it is impossible to ignore the growing number of men playing roller derby, with roughly 30 active men's teams compared to approximately 100 women's leagues in the UK (Rollin' News, 2013).

In the first months of 2013 as I began the research blog, skaters made suggestions for what I should write about, and stories from the league's beginning became a popular theme in these discussions. Period Drama reminded me 'didn't everyone used to call each other "rollerbitches"?' (field-notes, February 2013). I began to search through email correspondence from 2008 to see what I could find out about 'rollerbitches'. I

recovered an email that I sent at the end of March 2008, before the league had even had its first practice:

> Hey lovely rollerladies,
>
> Our second meeting is tomorrow in bannermans from 7pm onwards, last week there was a freaking awesom [sic] turnout and it'd be ace if we could match it again tomorrow.
>
> Rollerbitches have been busy and there's loads of things to report and talk about, and still loads of organising we need to do, so if you were along last week come again! and if you're interested in getting involved, whether this be skating, refereeing, coaching, jeerleading, point scoring, clock watching, first aiding, press officering, photographing, or anything else at all then come along!
>
> Rollergirls get 3 for the price of 2 on the whole bar, and sandwiches.
>
> Hope to see you there
>
> daisy disease xxxxx

This email is remarkable for its use of three different roller-prefixed appellations. All of them are gendered, we are roller-'ladies', 'bitches' or 'girls', and their use illustrates the confusion that was rife when it came to the question of what we should label ourselves now we were doing this new thing called roller derby. In discussion with Period Drama I had to admit that I had indeed called people 'rollerbitches', she laughs and exclaims that she can't imagine me, or anyone else, ever doing such a thing.

Three-and-a-half years later, the use of gendered labels was discussed in film-making workshops. In the first workshop, as I asked skaters to discuss representations of roller derby in existing documentary films, newspaper articles and skater-authored books, their conversation shifted to the league's own promotional posters:

> PD: But the thing is I mean even on our posters we say "all girl".
>
> TC: Do we still do that? (yeah) I totally had it in my head that we'd stopped…
>
> PD: We should just call it "roller derby".

ST: No it doesn't say "all girl" it just says "live roller derby".

TC: It used to say "all female flat track roller derby" but does it, did we not stop doing that?

ST: It just says "live roller derby".

(yeah that's what it says)

(yeah we changed it)

TC: Good!

- film-making workshop, September 2011

A change took place towards the end of 2010, that not all skaters in the workshop are equally aware of, from producing posters that proclaim 'Live! All female! Roller derby!' (figures 4.2 & 4.3) to those which state 'Live roller derby' without the 'all-female' descriptor (figures 4.4 & 4.5).

While the league's Design Committee used to produce posters that included 'all-female' as a descriptor of what roller derby was, as Tiny Chancer queried, *we stopped doing that.* In 2011 when the workshops take place men's roller derby is still in its infancy in the UK. In 2010 there was one 'closed-door' men's bout (Birmingham) and one 'exhibition' game (Lincolnshire), which took place before the 'main' women's bout.

At the time of the workshop roller derby was still considered a women's sport; the issue is whether and how to articulate it as such. As the discussion continued participants considered the nuances of 'all female':

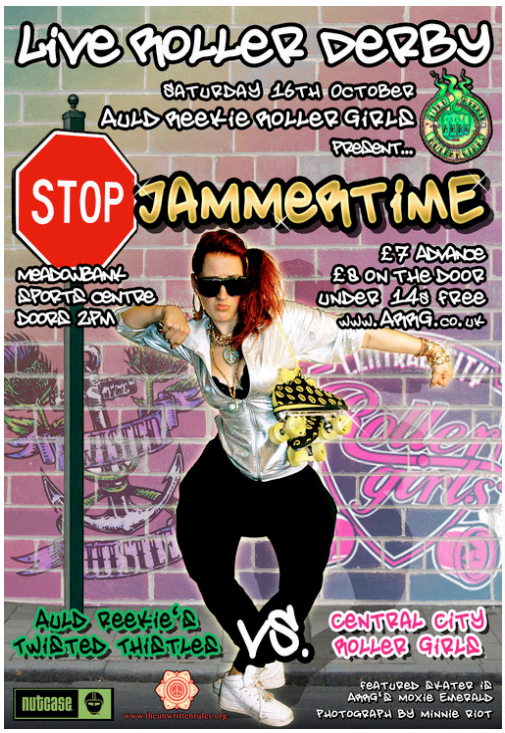
KD: Isn't that a bit of an issue though because isn't it at the same time quite cool that it's an all-female sport?

PD: Yeah but you don't have to call it "all-female", you could call it "women's roller derby".

KD: But I mean was there a point to just, to removing any, reference to the gender thing?

ST: No…

4.2 & 4.3 Posters for bouts hosted in February and August 2010.



4.4 & 4.5 Posters for bouts hosted in October 2010 and April 2011.

T: I think it was just a question of space.

TC: But I think it's a bit kind of like dehumanizing somehow but, but, I don't know it seems so kind of sensationalist "all female".

T: Yeah it's like "girl on girl"…

TC: Exactly, like "just come and see some hot girl on girl action".

- film-making workshop, September 2011

There is ambivalence here. When roller derby as 'women's sport' is 'quite cool', it is worth emphasizing; roller derby is different and special. While Sally Tape and Tilda suggested that removing 'all-female' was a pragmatic decision, Tiny Chancer interpreted the phrase as 'dehumanizing' and 'sensationalist'. 'All female' is provocative, it makes roller derby stand out, and can evoke, as Tilda suggested, an eroticized and heteronormative male gaze, seeking 'girl on girl' action. This sensationalism is about the asymmetry in the way different sports are marked by gender; sport played by men is often articulated simply as 'sport', and 'sport' un-marked by gender is often presumed to be played by men:

So we've got a sport of our own that we've created and it's recognized as a female sport or as sport that women play and I don't even know how you'd really define it, because sport, you don't say "men's football", you say "football" and "women's football" and "tennis" and "the ladies tennis" [laughs] so I dunno, it is a bit weird that we always say "all female roller derby" because it should just be a women's sport you shouldn't have to say…

MB: yeah you don't say like, "Hibs, an all male football club ".

[laughs] "Live, all male!" [laughs] yeah you don't really need to say that

MB: I wish they did …

Yeah, "Live football! Played by men!"

- Orville, individual interview, June 2011

The implication of the workshop discussion is that labeling roller derby, as 'all-female' was a mistake to be rectified, moved away from. Considered alongside Orville's laughter at 'Live football! Played by men!', this dynamic is inflected by the

gender regime of a broader field of sport where 'you don't need to say' that football is played by men. Concurrently if roller derby was not articulated as a *women's sport* it would perhaps be assumed to be played by men. At the same time marking any sports practice as the 'women's version' can contribute to its continued marginalization and trivialization (Chapter 2).

It is in this context that roller derby as a *women's sport* continues, despite reservations, to be celebrated. Correspondingly there is much ambivalence among participants when it comes to men playing roller derby. In December 2012 the UKRDA admitted its first men's team, the Crash Test Brummies, and updated its logo accordingly, adding a new – gendered male – figure to the existing 'female' image (figures 4.6 & 4.7).

It was once common to refer to men's derby as 'merby', an inversion of the usual asymmetries of gender-marking in sports. When I met Quadzilla, a leading proponent of men's derby in the US, he rejected 'merby', citing similar issues to those participants discuss around 'all-female'. Quadzilla saw 'merby' as trivializing men's derby and as unfairly emphasizing gender, 'you don't call women's roller derby werby do you?' (field-notes, May 2010).

Early in 2013 I went to watch a men's game held in Falkirk, I caught a lift with KK, whose husband was skating in the bout. When I told Tiny Chancer I was going she made a disgusted face and asked 'why are you going to do that?' While many participants support the men they know as referees, friends and partners who decide to play roller derby, there is wariness among many skaters, a fear that men's roller derby will come to eclipse the women's game, and that as a sport played by men and women roller derby will loose something of its unique appeal as a sport that in its contemporary form is remarkable for its development by and for women:

> People would automatically think that men's roller derby is better, and then they [men] would be considered the real ones, and that would be just business at usual… I can't really think of any other time where women have, on their own, on a like really basic level just gotten together and just said "no no no fuck off this is ours" and just kept it that way you know… (SF, individual interview, May 2011)

FIGURE 4.6 UNITED KINGDOM ROLLER DERBY ASSOCIATION LOGO, CIRCA. 2010-11

FIGURE 4.7 UNITED KINGDOM ROLLER DERBY ASSOCIATION LOGO, CIRCA. 2012

> I'm sure I've seen a clip [of men's derby] and been like "what are they up to?" that's really bad though 'cause that sounds quite derogatory [laughing] um, and it's, like I think that it's really important to uphold a good standard of not erm, not taking the piss so it's not fair to be like "Ha! Men! They're all like this… they can't play derby!" But, at the same time there is because of the imbalance [between men and women] in like sports in general it's a little bit hard to not be like yeah, "this is our sport actually"…
>
> - Tiny Chancer, individual interview, October 2010

Participants at once recognized that a status as a women's sport interferes with and interrupts the chances of recognition as 'real, serious, sport', and continue to cherish roller derby's uniqueness, and radical potential, as sport that developed as a women's sport, without any counterpart played by men. Confining discussion to 'women's' and 'men's' roller derby erases the issue of trans* inclusion in roller derby, and repeats logics of binary, essential gender that underpin sport more broadly (Cavanagh & Sykes, 2006). At the time of writing participants were drafting a 'trans* inclusion policy'. The advent of men's derby complicates a situation in which participants have long struggled with how to signify gender.

In the early months of 2011 Sally Tape, The Beefcake and I sit on the floor in a sports hall in Aberdeen, flicking through the bout programme waiting for the game to begin. The inaugural roller derby world cup is scheduled for later that year and Team Scotland need a logo; various skaters try their hand at rough proposals. One of these proposals features in the bout programme; a sketch of a lion rampant, from Scotland's second flag. This lion rampant has been modified and is now wearing quad skates and, much to our amusement, features a pair of breasts. The 'boobed lion' is the subject of much laughter, in no small part because the boobs it has appear to be sideways, stacked one on top of each other so as to be visible between its outstretched forelimbs. A few weeks later another proposal is made, this time for the team's uniforms, of a white Saltire cross on a blue vest. When the image is posted on Team Scotland's Facebook page The Beefcake comments, 'I prefer this sort of style to the pin-up style logo. Less boobs more BUSINESS.' (capitalization original, field-notes April 2011).

‘Boobs’ are symbolically incompatible with the serious ‘business’ of playing a sport, with representing roller derby in recognizably sports-like terms. As SF puts it, ‘if you wanna get taken seriously don’t show your tits, where have we heard that before? Oh wait, everywhere’ (individual interview, May 2011). However, ‘boobs’ continue to feature in roller derby images and logos. The silhouetted suggestion of breasts in the UKRDA logo (figures 4.6 & 4.7) clearly attributes gender to the red skater. ‘Boobs’, whether sideways on a hastily sketched national symbol or outlined in on an anonymous skater (now accompanied by a second figure with notably absent boob signification) don’t exactly continue the work that ‘all-female’ performed on the league’s old posters. Roller derby is no longer ‘all-female’, but the gendered character of skaters does not cease to matter. Gender is not erased entirely from the representations that skaters produce, even – and perhaps especially – as men play roller derby in increasing numbers and as skaters make their way through the tangled knots of signification that envelope roller derby and women in sport more broadly.

From 2008-2010 the league’s posters (figures 4.2- 4.5) featured jumbled and somewhat confusing images, in which skaters themselves were not playing roller derby, but rather dressed-up, as Elvis, Harry Potter, MC Hammer or as a Coronation Street Zombie. Until summer 2011 the league’s bouts were all ‘themed’ in a similar way, normally in connection with an incongruous cultural reference drawn from film, television, or national popular culture, with a pun and a nod to roller derby. Bout ‘names’ included; *Fishnet Burns Night, Jurassic Skate Park, Loch Mess,* and *Hadrian’s Brawl.* The posters were remarkable for the degree to which they were relatively unrecognizable as sport, and not necessarily intelligible to anyone who wasn’t already involved in roller derby.

While these images do not support existing analyses of a ‘violent, sexually raw femininity’ (Carlson, 2010: 433), they do intervene somewhat in a straightforward presentation of roller derby as ‘sport’. In 2011 however, there are visible changes in the form and content of the images, as well as the removal of ‘all-female’, that are the manifestation of deliberate decisions to produce ‘more sporting’ and ‘more serious’ promotional material. The figures featured in the posters become less and less marked by femininity, and more and more by signifiers of ‘sport’; ‘all-female’

and themes for bouts were removed, in favour of images of skaters actually playing roller derby (figure 4.8).

Figure 4.8 Bout poster, June 2011.

A certain kind of gender play so often lauded in previous research with roller derby (Carlson 2010, 2011; Finley 2010; Hern 2010), is not entirely disproved by my empirical material, but rather is denounced by participants as *what it used to be like.* Accounts of becoming more serious and more sports-like, are bound up with the way that roller derby is gendered, and the ways that skaters produce representations about the gender composition of their sport. As understandings shift from 'sport for women who don't like sport' to 'for *people* who really, really like sport', roller derby as

something done by ‘bitches’, ‘ladies’, ‘females’ and to a lesser extent ‘women’ is what ‘people used to say’.

The challenges skaters encounter are well rehearsed in theory (Chapter 2). There is precedent for interpreting signifiers of femininity (boobs on a lion, ‘all-female’ on posters) simultaneously as subversive undoings of naturalized associations between sport, masculinity and male bodies, as trivializing and apologizing for women’s sports participation, and as ‘maintaining gender hegemony’ (Finley, 2010: 382, see also Carlson, 2010: 428; Pavlidis & Fulagar, 2013: 685). Participants’ movement away from overt representations of roller derby as a women’s sport is amenable to a similar range of analyses; to be de-gendered entirely runs the risk of erasing contemporary roller derby’s emergence and initial development as a specifically women’s sport. The corollary here is that sporting legitimacy, getting taken seriously, appears to be accompanied by a necessary abandonment of gender critique (Price & Parker, 2003), or at least gender engagement. I return to, and problematize, such an interpretation in Chapter 6, which suggests that participants do not cease to engage with gender, but rather that there are changes in the ways that they do so.

I now turn to the final central aspect of roller derby’s difference from ‘sport’, DIY organization, and consider how early forms of league organization were made sense of in retrospect.

4.3 DIY Organization

> *I quite liked the fact that it was a shambles at the start [laughing] people were just making it up as they went along [laughing] and you know if you approached someone they were always friendly… and I like the fact that [league]’s a lot more, it is a lot more structured now and I think, it’s a lot more of a sport now than it was when we first started, I think and I’m not sure if I would have liked that at the beginning when I started… [laughing] but I do love it now [laughing]*
>
> The Beefcake, individual interview, October 2010

The co-constitution of the league’s short history and participants re-interpretations of this recent past is at the fore here. In hindsight an initial lack of ‘organization’ was subject to nostalgic laughter, as amusingly ‘shambolic’ when re-evaluated in

comparison to later, 'more structured' forms of organization. In this section I focus on how skaters make sense of league organization during its first two years. Particular attention is given to notions of membership, who belongs and how, in the months between the league's foundation in April 2008 and our first bout in November that same year. In these early days there were three related absences; of regulated procedures for joining the league; of bureaucratic administration of membership; and of codified policy for selecting a team of 14 skaters from the wider league.

The women-led aspect of roller derby was intertwined with doing-it-ourselves. At the beginning at least, DIY organization meant, for the most part, organized by women, although as more and more men play roller derby 'by the skaters, for the skaters' no longer has this implication. The Beefcake emphasized 'passion', 'inclusivity', and 'friendliness' as characteristic of her early experiences, and made connections to the absence of anyone 'in charge':

> Just seeing that everybody really had the passion for it, I think everybody that I met, like remember Busty Malone there at the beginning, and there was just a real feeling of inclusiveness, because of the emails that used to appear, and I [laughing] found one from you the other day [both laughing] and you know, sending it out to everybody, it was that sense of like "I don't know you, you don't know me" but you've just been really nice and really helpful… say if I'd of picked another sport and decided to join and it was far more structured, and already set up and maybe, not run by, you know, all females [laughing] I don't think it would have been as good, you know there's, there's nobody sort of in charge… it was friendly and relaxed you don't feel any pressure, to actually be a good skater, you just felt like you were being invited to be part of something that might be really good fun…
>
> - The Beefcake, individual interview, October 2010

In the first months of the league however, we began to think about applying for funding, a move that necessitated having a bank account, which in turn required a constitution; itself a step towards formalizing the organization. In the collaborative writing of this document a motto of 'it's nice to be nice' was incorporated as one of the first constitutional items (appendix viii). The constitution, an act of codification,

demonstrated how the league's early organization relied upon, and sought to perpetuate, informal personal connections and relations, that had not yet been formalized or *explicitly* agreed upon.

Significantly The Beefcake also remembers not feeling 'any pressure, to actually be a good skater'. That 'at the beginning' 'fun' was prioritised over ability was a theme in a paired interview in the summer of 2012, with Wilma and her refereeing husband, Fred:

> You two [pointing to W & MB] were the worst starters I've ever seen [all laughing], you looked like you'd never be able to skate, I mean, you look at the ones that come along now, and I mean you basically have to be able to skate to get involved now, but when you started you'd [W & MB] have never got through, you'd never be able to join now… the older members of the club, when they started you'd skate around for about 20 minutes and then gossip with each other and have a laugh and play games with each other and it was about trying to make it fun and entertaining so that you'd all enjoy learning to play roller derby…
>
> - Fred, paired interview with Wilma, May 2011

For Fred, 'older members of the club' benefitted from an initial atmosphere in which skill did not matter. Like Fred laughs heartily at, in 2008 I absolutely could not skate. I didn't think I'd ever be able to, but I went to every practice we had, determined to make the most of the intense fun of trying to. The relative irrelevance of skill and ability was further visible in early approaches to *membership*. For the first twelve months of the league's existence the refrain was that 'anyone' was welcome to come to our twice-weekly practice sessions. The only semi-formalized practice of 'membership' was a 'contacts list': a word processing document, sporadically updated by myself, usually in a pub, with the details, in theory at least, of anyone who had ever come along to a practice. The document listed skaters' derby name, real name, address, telephone number and email address, was chronically out of date, functionally limited and stored only on the hard drive of my unreliable laptop. It wasn't even in alphabetical order.

At this stage recruitment to the league was by word of mouth, and skaters encouraged almost everyone they knew, or whom they'd only just met, to come

along and have a go. We made posters and flyers and intermittently posted them in pubs, nightclubs, cafes, universities and tattoo parlors. While the intention was that the league would be 'open to all', in practice the reliance on our existing networks meant that most people who became involved already had some connection to the league. Otherwise flyers directed potential skaters to the league's newly minted 'MySpace' page (now 'the old MySpace' and subject to jokes about how disorganized and ridiculous those early days were) which detailed the times and locations of practices and instructed anyone who was interested to simply turn up, watch a practice, borrow a pair of skates and have a go. The first practice was always free of charge, and flyers emphasized how 'size, shape and skating ability don't matter' (figure 4.9).

FIGURE 4.9 'SIZE, SHAPE AND SKATING ABILITY DON'T MATTER'. FLYER 2008.

Practices themselves were rather haphazard affairs, involving a lot of 'gossiping with each other and having a laugh' and everyone practiced together, there were no formalized distinctions between skaters. I remember Pauline Baynes borrowing a broom from the sports center cupboard and using it as a crutch to aid her balance.

These sessions frequently began with a sense of not really knowing what to do, and when, after a few months Armalite Angie and her refereeing husband, Cain Unstable, expressed an interest in transferring from Glasgow to our league, we were eager to benefit from their relative wealth of experience.

By this time regular attendees had learned to skate and began to master the basics of staying upright, stopping and turning corners. Now when a new potential 'member' showed up it was up to someone, whoever felt inclined or able, to teach them how to put their kit on properly, how to stand and propel themselves forwards, and how to fall safely. Most often, new recruits would be taken down to one end of the hall to skate back and forth across the width of the space, while everyone else whizzed around the track. Newer skaters would practice this way, squeezed in at the edge of the hall, or using the track fleetingly when more experienced skaters were stretching or taking a water break, until they were considered roughly ready to join in.

The 'contacts list' then, needed updating as often as someone new came along, which was unpredictable; there could be half a dozen new people at once or none for weeks. Leaving the league was equally fluid, if a skater asked to be taken off the list they could be, otherwise their details would remain, even if they stopped coming to practice entirely. The contacts list was more of a mimesis of bureaucratic administration, an imitation of what a 'secretary' should do, of what 'membership' was supposed to look like. I remember an uncomfortable feeling that we *should* have a list of members and there was a vague consensus that we needed a list of contact details for effective communication, even if in practice we didn't necessarily *do* anything that much with it.

The 'contacts list' did however begin to delineate membership. It instated a loose group that it was possible to belong to, if only through the action of coming to a loud and brightly lit sports hall on a Monday evening between 8 and 10pm and giving your name, email address and phone number to an enthusiastic sweaty person, in a strange outfit, on roller skates, while grown women shrieked with laughter as they fell over in the background. As the number of people turning up to practice fluctuated but steadily increased, as the league began to seem more solid, the prospect of bouting, actually playing against another team became slowly more

realistic. This prospect added impetus to the sense that there was a need to delineate who belonged and how; in order to play against another team we needed to put together a team of 14 skaters and decide who should be on that team.

Throughout 2008, there was no sure way to tell whether someone was a 'member' of the league, other than from a nebulous sense of who turned up to practice. There was a core of people almost always at practice but otherwise membership was fluid, all that any potential skater had to do was turn up at practice, and, like the early recruitment flyers said, 'get involved'. Skaters paid £4 per-practice through 2008, which was the lowest price we worked out we could charge and still cover the cost of hall hire. Pauline Baynes bought a lockable petty cash box and either she or I would collect everyone's pound coins as they made their way into the hall. If there were time, a scrap of paper and a working pen, we would write a list of the skaters who turned up and paid, and stash the lists in the bottom of the cash box, where they stayed along with IOUs from skaters and crumpled receipts from the sports centre. Aside from the sporadic and often illegible jotted notes there was no other record of how many or which skaters came to practice and when. Recording who was at practice wasn't a regular or regulated occurrence. So not only was membership fluid, but the regularity with which skaters turned up at bi-weekly practices was not formally or routinely recorded.

At this point we were still yet to bout. We hadn't yet fielded a team, and we hadn't yet thought about how this should be done. It wasn't long though, before practices were focused on preparing for our first ever bout, against Glasgow Roller Girls' 'B' team, scheduled to take place in Glasgow that November. Angie and Cain were the only people who had any experience of actually bouting; as such they played a key role in the frantic preparations for this seemingly momentous event. When they had both initially transferred to the league there was much excitement surrounding their involvement, I remember feeling eager to benefit from their experience. In the lead up to the bout Angie suggested that while she didn't want to skate against her old team so soon she was interested in acting as team captain, and Cain similarly proposed that his existing refereeing experience made him well-placed to act as the league's coach. There was no protocol for who should fill these positions, at this

point we didn't even know *if* the league needed or wanted a captain and a coach, let alone how to decide who should take on such roles. Although neither of them was voted into these positions, many skaters were enthusiastic, and the whole league was in a hurry.

The centrality of Angie and particularly of Cain to the league's first year of operation, especially their not having been voted in to their roles, was to later manifest itself in on-going tensions surrounding the first event hosted by the league and eventually leading to a re-structuring of the whole organization. I consider these events in detail in Chapter 5, for now the point is simply that at this stage 'DIY organization', in practice, was less a set of principles articulating a commitment to non-hierarchical and collaborative organizing, but is rather indicative of a situation in which we really did not know how we should set about doing things like bouting against another team. It was 'shambolic' and we were 'making it up as we went along'. Cain became responsible, alongside Angie, and Owlison who was training to be a referee, for selecting the team to bout against Glasgow that November. In this context there was little to no broader discussion as to what factors should guide the process, or indeed how this first ever team was eventually drafted. There were two related absences, firstly of debate as to how the team should be selected and who by, and secondly of a codified procedure for doing so.

The skaters in this photo (figure 4.10) were playing against another team when a barely eight months previously there hadn't been a roller derby league in Edinburgh. We met at Candy's house the night before to drink beer and paint our names and numbers on the mint-green t-shirts Lily had bought from Primark. The next morning we painted our faces with stripes of bright green war paint and lost the game by such an enormous margin that we didn't even bother keeping track of the score. We were overjoyed even in our resounding defeat; the score didn't matter because we were so proud that we'd managed to actually take part in a real roller derby bout.

4.10 Team[5] fielded against Glasgow in the league's first ever bout, November 2008.

Focusing exclusively on instances such as The Beefcake's assertion that she 'quite liked' the league's initially shambolic character, and Fred's emphasis on the 'fun' of the early days leads to simplified and rose-tinted accounts of *what it used to be like*. However, the simmering tensions that arose from the lack of transparent procedure for team selection in 2008 suggest that there was perhaps a need for 'more structured' forms of organization. Similarly Orville recollects joining the league at a time when there was no regular or regulated procedure for doing so. Orville contrasts her experience from 2009 to 'these days', mid-2011 when the interview was conducted, when the Fresh Meat training programme was fully instituted:

> It was quite stressful, because back then as you know, you basically just had to join a practice even if you couldn't skate… and it was quite tough,

[5] L-R back row: Moxie Emerald; Pikie Rose; Madame de Stompadour; Daisy Disease; Anarchick; Crazylegs; Swamp Monster; Mad Mim. L-R front row: Lily Lethal; Juicy Lucy; Switchblade Jade; Danger Mouth; Zillah.

> and newbs these days, have nothing to complain about as far as I'm concerned. … Because back then as well like anyone just had to take whoever the new person was, and some people are better at it than others… so it was quite stressful… and you were thrown in at the deep-end without having any skills, and when I started and when JG started a lot of other people started at the same time and never came back, 'cause it was either they got injured, or it was too stressful, or they just couldn't cope with it, and I don't think that would have happened if there had been a nice structured programme to look after them…

This is tied to the idea of progression from somewhat inevitably disorganized 'grassroots' beginnings:

> But I don't think it could have necessarily developed any other way unless you're getting in coaches and paying them to do a job, because if you just get a bunch of complete amateurs together, to do something in a grassroots way, then that's just is the way it's going to go I expect and you're going to go through these processes of development or whatever, but, I think it was necessary to move on from that to progress the league.
>
> - Orville, individual interview, June 2011

Similarly there is a sense of inevitability, of diminishing fun, when Fred wonders what it would be like if a new league was set up:

> But then you think, well would you join that new league 'cause it'll be all new and fresh again, but I just think it'll end up going down this path again… and I'm not going to say "this is what's going to happen" because the quicker you start saying that then the quicker it'll happen…
>
> - Fred, paired interview with Wilma, June 2011

There is a sense of creeping inevitability about the coming 'structure':

> For the league to keep going and expand… you're bound to have to get more organized, I think there was a lot of trial and error and the beginning that forces you to set policies and rules and regulations.
>
> - The Beefcake, individual interview, October 2010

What interviewees' reminiscences and ethnographic accounts drawn from my own recollections have in common is the description of a relative absence of rationalized,

institutionalized, bureaucratized organization. While some emphasize the appeal of, for instance, there being 'no one in-charge', other evidence suggests that a lack of codified procedure was one factor enabling some people to be 'in-charge' and occupy positions of leadership and decision making without transparency or agreement. Alongside laments on the decreasing importance of 'fun' there is a sense of development and progression, of things getting better, and often these accounts are studded with laughter, and the joke seems to be one of laughing at our past selves, at our naivety and inexperience, from a position of 'knowing better now'. Changes in membership administration and team selection, and crisis points in their development, are returned to in Chapter 5, with a particular emphasis on the shifting value of competition in the league and the increasingly bureaucratic organization of membership.

Thus far in the chapter I have used empirical material from interviews, workshops, participant observation and as well as that drawn from my own involvement to describe the league's early days, and skaters' understandings of this short history. I now move on to discuss issues in the construction of these narratives themselves.

4.4 Constructing Narratives

In their accounts, participants articulate relations between the past, present and future of roller derby and the league, and change in their own self-understandings and practice. *What it used to be like* has an explanatory role in such accounts, and was mobilized both to justify and contest what roller derby is like 'now'. Moments from the recent past were reiterated, became pivotal in skaters' sense-making stories and were worked in to narratives of linear progress towards roller derby's recognition as a serious sport. Doing research in this context necessitates a discussion of my own implication, in producing yet another re-iteration of stories of change, another telling of 'the' narrative, and perhaps constructing an 'ethnographic present' somewhat abstracted from the flows of empirical actuality. In this section I thus consider some of the conflicts that can be glossed over in smooth narratives from 'then' to 'now', and that there is an imperative to attend to in my re-tellings.

In the planning stages of the film-making workshops, skaters decide that 'the growth and development of the league' should be a central theme of their film. Sally Tape suggests filming 'all the old logos changing into newer ones', or 'someone looking through a shoe-box full of old fliers, seeing the development in how we design stuff' (film-making workshops, September 2011). Notions of 'progression' and 'development' are rife in skaters' accounts:

> You could start it all off as like quite sketchy, grainy kind of 8mm film you know, and then it gets into the whole home made video-cam, badly edited, jumpy camera shaking, and then it starts to progress into like really well shot, kind of nicely edited, and so the undercurrent is the development of the league, because that's very true when you think about what we were like before, kind of ramshackle and everyone kind of just like all-sorts, and now we're like this totally honed athletic unit, to get from there to here is like "bloody hell how did we do that?!"
>
> - Alabama Thunder Fuck, individual interview, June 2011

Alabama imagines a film where the form is also a commentary on the content, and in which the footage incrementally increases in quality, just as the league is 'now' 'this totally honed athletic unit'.

Participants' narratives of the past are interspersed with looking to the future, and imagining changes that might occur in times to come:

> If the sport goes, and this is getting recorded [both laughing] and I mean this, if the sport ever goes down the wynds of making you use your real name I will change my name by deed poll, to [derby name]
>
> - Iona Rover, individual interview, October 2010

Tiny Chancer and Sally Tape discussed the past and future together:

> TC: We said, like that the history of [league], it was less structured, and like really DIY and still a bit kind of rough around the edges, it was kind of endearingly, I don't wanna say disorganized but, it wasn't as like slick as it is now, and there was still a really strong focus on fairness and equality, everybody getting to have their say, which actually, thinking about it, the less people you have the easier that is to manage, but I don't think it's any less important to us now, it's probably more important to us now. I think there was a sense of it being a bit more like for fun, you

> know there was a bit less of the big ambitions, because I think as a start-up league you don't necessarily worry about world domination just yet [laughs], like we didn't really have any idea of the kind of scale that we would end up with and we didn't kind of really push marketing ourselves and the games and things,
>
> ST: we were just doing it for us I suppose, we didn't realize how many people would want to come and see and join or anything
>
> TC: and like the future, obviously joining WFTDA means that we'll getting ranked, and that means that like everybody will sort of know to some extent or another who [league] is, which is crazy [laughs] and um, and going to America, and we're saying like as we get bigger, is it gonna be harder to kind of maintain all of our like inclusivity and everyone together, things like that, there's probably going to be like divides of, of different skill levels just 'cause it's such massive err, skills gap and those kind of things…
>
> - film-making workshop, September 2011

The way that Sally Tape and Tiny Chancer conceptualized the future; the likelihood of the league 'getting ranked' based on bout scores, that it might 'be harder to kind of maintain all of our like inclusivity' and prospects of divisions in the league position 'just doing it for us' and 'a really strong focus on fairness and equality' comparatively in the past, as easier when the league was newer and smaller. These dynamics are central to discussion of 'what the league became' in Chapter 5.

For now my concern is with how the research methods employed, and the timescale of the research project, facilitated and stimulated a reflexive 'looking back'. Events become seminal in their later re-tellings, Alabama Thunder Fuck recalls travelling to the first tournament held in the UK:

> That was just hilarious because it [was] so ramshackle, that's not a sports team, it's a school outing, …and then just going "holy shit we're serious!"
>
> - Alabama Thunder Fuck, individual interview, June 2011

Commenting on her 2010 interview transcript for its inclusion in a zine in 2013 Pauline Baynes says:

> I really enjoyed reading these snippets. It reminded me how weird everything was back in the day. I am glad I was there!
>
> - Pauline Baynes, zine introduction, March 2013

That it was 'weird… back in the day' establishes distance between 'then' and 'now', and between people who have been involved in different stages of the league's development. Within narratives of linear progression and change organizational moments can take on explanatory, justification and even normative power. 'Weirdness' has appeared before, again in Pauline Bayne's recollections of the meeting in 2009 where we asked 'should we try and win?'.

Returning to that meeting now, I want to think about how this moment, and Pauline's reference to it, only became analytically important some months after the interview. When Pauline mentions the meeting I don't ask any more about it. We are talking with or through this event from the past, not about it, using it as an example, a shared reference point. Pauline conceptualizes the meeting as indicative of roller derby's 'weird-ness'; in the interview, in hindsight, it is briefly reconstructed to illustrate, and stand-in for, the changing character of roller derby and the league.

The meeting was held in HF bedroom one evening late in 2009 and mostly concerned how much priority we should, as a league, give to winning games, compared to everyone taking part, having fun and learning from the experience. In a sense it was a meeting about what the league was, and could or should be. The meeting was funny; and Tiny Chancer and I often looked back at it with laughter when we moved in together later in 2010. Wilma and Alabama Thunder Fuck get progressively drunker throughout the meeting, they have a bottle of wine each, and keep interrupting when other people are speaking to make increasingly loud and slurred interjections. Alabama is worried derby will go the same way as snowboarding, co-opted and commercialized with sponsorship deals and regulations. Jo sits on her bed smoking a joint; pregnant Irene Brew sits on the floor, which is strewn with tubes of Pringles, bags of crisps, jelly sweets, cakes and tubs of humus. The league collectively decided, in a vote that took place among the drunkenness and crisps, to apply to the WFTDA apprentice scheme, and to 'be competitive', to play to win. 'Deciding to be competitive' is just one moment in time, and although located

in the past it is not static or discrete, it reverberates in later interpretations of what the league is, and what it might be.

That 'we decided to be competitive' was a phrase reiterated again and again by skaters on Sports and Training Committee in discussions about team selection, the level and difficulty of training sessions and how to integrate newer members into the league. These issues came up at almost every Sports and Training meeting in 2010 and 2011. The meeting, where 'we decided to be competitive', is frequently referenced as a justification for later decisions. That the league is and should be 'competitive' is not entirely taken-for-granted however, and 'playing to win' as a guiding principle is contested:

> W: Its just like you say, that's what was voted for, but it was voted for as long as it suits us wasn't it
>
> F: Yeah and I don't think it does suit us at all any more, and I really don't think WFTDA suits [league]
>
> - Fred and Wilma, paired interview, June 2011

AY, reflected on league decision-making:

> Sometimes people say "oh we all agreed to this thing" and like yeah, did we really? Maybe you agreed to this thing two years ago. Everyone wanted to join WFTDA, did we really want to though?
>
> - AY, individual interview, May 2012

References to moments in the league's short history do not establish a hegemony of institutional memory; memories are more or less shared, but their meanings and implications are contested. The early years of the league are a referential landscape that is real in its reverberations, but far from being passive, or wholly agreed upon, recollections are mobilized in contemporary organizational moments to make sense of, and agree and disagree about, the presence and future of the league as well as the past. This happens not only in the stories that skaters tell, but also in the research accounts that I give.

The idea of the 'ethnographic present' (Sanjek, 1991) can be found in much writing concerned with the process and products of fieldwork, particularly when it comes to producing ethnographic accounts. In this instance, as the research aims shifted alongside the changes that took place in the league, the relevance of moments in interviews and everyday life often did not become evident until some time after the fact. In retrospect the meaning of occurrences and utterances shifts, and takes on significance in relation to what has happened, what has been said and done, since. This is clear when skaters both romanticize and denounce past events and their interpretations, but also as my writing echoes the revisionism of 'people used to say it was like a sport for women who don't like sport' as I endeavor to give an account that is contextualized, but not unproblematically 'explained' by the past.

Gruber's concept of 'ethnographic salvage' is helpful to think with here. Gruber argues that anthropology, particularly in the USA, is characterized by the legacy of a sense of an urgent 'scientific mission' at the discipline's foundation, to collect and preserve knowledge about indigenous American cultures 'about to be destroyed', (1970: 1294).

> "Before it is too late! Before it is too late!" The refrain runs through so much of the developing discipline that the needs of recovery, of preservation, of salvage in the face of the impending extinction of peoples and their cultures dictated much that came to be anthropology. (Gruber, 1970: 1296)

The people who play roller derby and roller derby as a culture are not in danger of extinction. The league is certainly not threatened by an aggressive colonial genocide of the kind that anthropologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were themselves no doubt implicated in. Moreover, roller derby is not a phenomenon that suffers from a lack of multiple forms of self-documentation, quite the opposite. Skaters publish books and author blogs narrating the revival of contemporary roller derby, and produce endless photographs of events and share them online. The league's online forum archives discussions and proliferating debates on what roller derby is and how the league should do what it does.

Gruber's talk of 'rapidly disappearing' (1970: 1294) and 'irretrievable' (ibid: 1295) data does however accord with a sense of how roller derby is changing, and how this change can seem almost too fast to keep up with: 'The problem with roller derby documentaries is that they are out of date by the time they get released. We move too fast around here innit.' (RH, field-notes, February 2013). Change in what roller derby *is* is bound up with processes of rationalization, disenchantment and bureaucratization at the level of the league.

At the time of writing, there is a solidifying sense of what roller derby is, and a corresponding apparent reduction of ambiguity and ambivalence in its relation to 'sport'; 'actually, it is for people who really, really like sport'. There is a possibility, if not a danger, that my accounts contribute to and exacerbate the processes they aim to describe. Looking again to Gruber, the impulse to preserve 'necessitated in the mind of the single collector a sense of order, a sense of system' (1970: 1297). An orientation towards salvaging what was rapidly becoming relegated to the past inculcates tendencies to draw distinctions between 'then' and 'now', as 'the presumed past met the present, (and) stability met change' (1970: 1298). The trouble here is the temptation to attribute disorder to the past and stability and coherence to the present and this is cut through by my position as an 'older' skater or as someone who was there 'at the beginning'.

Summary & Discussion

What it used to be like and what 'people used to say', in hindsight become objects of laughter and gentle derision; re-articulated as artifacts from a time when participants didn't necessarily take roller derby, or themselves, entirely seriously. In combination with a position as an emergent, DIY sports practice, played predominantly and until recently almost exclusively by women, participants' re-tellings of the league's 'shambolic' beginnings and confused early representational style provides the background to more contemporary concerns with serious recognition. Reminiscing about the league's 'weird' or 'ramshackle' early days is a way that skaters make sense of why roller derby has a problem with *getting taken seriously*.

Wearing make-up, hot-pants, the 'joy' of fishnets and opportunities to 'play with' one's image, are all increasingly relegated to the past in participants' accounts, and yet are often the keystone of existing academic interpretations. After I shared Carlson's (2010) paper with skaters, Pauline Bayne's response was indicative, suggesting that the article, read like it was about '2006 style derby' rather than as it was played 'now' (field-notes, December 2011). Notions of roller derby's significant difference from sport, when articulated in those practices of dress previously interpreted as locations for gender subversion/conformity, and the most overt signifiers of emphasized femininity ('all-female', 'boobs') are increasingly positioned in the past. This evidence suggests a shift in gender maneuvering, the pursuit of sporting legitimacy or serious recognition appears to be accompanied by some abandonment of overt engagement with gender. Roller derby seems to move from a set of practices that intervene in the meaning of 'sport' and masculinity/femininity to a claim for the legitimacy of women's sport. I return to, and problematize these dynamics in Chapter 6.

There is more ambivalence however, when it comes to roller derby's status as a *women's sport*. Participants' struggle to maintain something of roller derby's uniqueness as a women's sport *sui generis* at the same time as arguing for sporting legitimacy. In doing so participants bump up against how gendered representations of roller derby are a barrier to seriousness recognition. While men's participation potentially increases its sporting legitimacy, participants are conflicted over the issue of men's roller derby, and are reluctant to entirely let go of definitions and representations of roller derby as *distinct* by virtue of its development by and for women.

Similarly, while participants cited the league's DIY organization to assert a difference from other forms of sport, this was not straightforwardly disavowed or positioned in the past. The beginnings of league organization were re-interpreted in two main ways. Firstly, as endearingly shambolic; positioned as somewhat idyllic, as a time of appealingly non-hierarchical, 'friendly' organization when skating skill was all but irrelevant and 'fun' was prioritized. Secondly and in contrast, problems and tensions associated with an initial lack of agreed upon organizational procedure also

infused participants' accounts, and clustered around team selection and positions of leadership. In these readings participants articulate a need for better organization, because of three related absences; of a regulated structure for new people joining the league, without which it was difficult and frightening to 'just join in'; of a rationalized or bureaucratic organization of membership, as a reliance on sporadic lists meant that there was no certainty as to who belonged to the league; and of a codified policy that legitimates who decides, and how it is decided, who should be on each bouting team, without which there were concerns that team selection was unfairly based on the personal preferences of those doing the selection.

As participants articulations of roller derby's relation to 'sport' shift from assertions of distinction to claims for similarity, the two central dynamics are firstly, that roller derby is (ambivalently) de-gendered, and secondly that the league becomes *more organized.* In reconstructing these accounts for research there is a danger of romanticizing the past as halcyon days of fun and/or of emphasizing the stresses, strains upsets and exclusions of 'making it up as we went along' and thus seeing the present as an inevitable response to the problems of the past. Participants summon the past to pass comment on the present and thus construct 'what it is like now' either as *progression* from a chaotic time, from which the league has thankfully moved away from or as *regression* from idyllic beginnings. These dynamics are most clear in terms of organization.

In this context it is helpful to focus on unintended consequences of participants' organizational practice. Interviewing Lady Garden in March 2010, we talk about the upcoming inaugural World Cup, rumors of which had just begun to circulate among skaters. Lady Garden talks about this as one example of how special roller derby is; the top level of play doesn't require a whole life-time of training, like other sports do, rather 'anyone' can do it. It turned out that the Brazilian team at this first World Cup was competing for the first time. Similar dynamics in the league mean that the 14 skaters on the team for our first bout, myself included, could go from not being able to skate to competing in a matter of months (figure 4.10).

However, every time the league fielded a team, 14 skaters became incrementally 'more experienced', having participated in yet another game, compared to those who

were not on the team. Once a team of 14 *had* bouted for the first time, it became increasingly unlikely that others could follow the same trajectory. Informal differences began to emerge between those who had competed on a team and those who had not. Rather than a feature inherent to what roller derby *is*, the 'openness' that Lady Garden and others identify, being able to compete after such short periods of time, became what roller derby *was*. Rather than an essential property of roller derby, this vector of difference from 'sport' turned out to be a phase of development. The league's organization was solidifying, and one unintended or unanticipated consequence of playing bouts against other teams was that some skaters became 'more experienced' than others. The growing importance of differences in skill, and their *formalization* is a central focus in Chapter 5.

Stories of *what it used to be like* are most often told at the same time as those of 'what it is like now'. This chapter has thus only semi-intentionally reproduced a gap in skaters' accounts; what happens in-between 'then' and 'now'? As Alabama Thunder Fuck put it: 'to get from there to here is like "bloody hell how did we do that?!"' Chapter 5 thus moves on to consider trajectories from the semi-mythical and always re-mobilized past to a 'now', through a detailed focus on how skaters put the decision to 'be competitive' into practice in the organization of membership.

Prior to Chapter 5 however, I turn to the first of four interludes, each of which take place in the gaps, and open up the cracks, between chapters. These interludes make two contributions (Chapter 3.4), firstly, joining with methodological debates around 'insider' research and, secondly, exploring the relations between 'seriousness' and sociological research methods. The interludes elaborate the thesis' analytical content, and re-tell stories of roller derby and the league through accounts of doing research.

INTERLUDE #1 A thesis for people who don't like theses?

Beginning research with the league necessitated movement between positions of participation and research, and was accompanied by feelings of discomfort and a practical awkwardness as leisure (roller derby) increasingly took on the character of work (research). Here I tell an auto-/ethnographic story of the unease and anxiety of doing research with friends in a context that I was thoroughly involved in, of professionalizing, in a sense, my roller derby participation.

'Insider' research is often conceptualized as a good opportunity to critically engage with broader principles of sociological research (Brogden, 2010; Chavez, 2008; Cooper, 2010; Delyser, 2001; Inckle, 2007; Lather, 2007; Reger 2001) and is implicated in broader epistemological debates as to the relations between, for instance, objectivity and subjectivity (Beck, 1967; Bourdieu, 2003; Haraway, 1988). This context led to an initial aim to do research that was *different*, much in the same way that participants initially articulated roller derby as different from other forms of sport. The idea was to do research that was evidently and self-consciously ambivalent about being research. However, I discuss below how these aims interacted with the practicalities of research, and how research can be related to seriousness through its status as *work*; a professional pursuit of specified, rationalized ends.

It was difficult, when I very first began to make field-notes, to know how to do it. In a sense, making field-notes was a practical problem; having a notebook close to hand whilst at practice literally got in the way of skating. In my kit bag at the side of the sports hall I forgot about it. Shoved in my bra it got too sweaty to be of any use, dug into my flesh and eventually fell out. At the practice where I officially began to 'do participant observation' I clutched on to my notebook during the warm-up skate, but jettisoned it when training really started; it got in the way. By extension doing research was getting in the way of playing roller derby. Having notebook and pen on my person felt essential somehow to the work of research. These objects made it visible and obvious, to myself as much as anyone else, that I was now 'doing research'. Bernadette skated alongside me as I clung to the notebook and tried to

look like I knew what I was doing. She asked what the notebook is for, and I told her. 'Oh! You are literally in the field!' she exclaimed, laughing. It was awkward.

Making field notes while at practice, at meetings, bouts and after-parties didn't really work. It was mentally and physically challenging to do what I would be doing anyway and keep notes; I couldn't do both at once. So I start getting the bus back into town after practice, stocking up on snacks and settling down in the shared study space. It is always after ten thirty by the time I am at a desk, I've been training for two hours and am straining to remember the jokes, confessions and small talk snatched between drills, during water-breaks, while getting changed, and when standing at the bus stop. I force myself to sit at the desk and type all I can remember. I could do this at home of course but I'm worried that I'd fall asleep. I walk back to my flat in the dark of the early hours of the morning. During the day, and especially in the first months of research while I continued to have responsibilities on the league's board as well as various committees, I would spend four or five hours on league business; emails, action points and forum discussions.

It felt like there wasn't enough time in the day to record and reflect upon my participation in the league. Roller derby had taken up the vast majority of my spare time for the past two years; excessive working hours seemed the best, if ridiculous and ineffectual, approach. Around this time Lady Garden suggested that I should record how many hours I spent playing and organizing roller derby, and factor them in to a standard working week. She was probably right but doing so would only have demonstrated what I knew already; a very great deal of my leisure time went on roller derby, but now that leisure time was work too. There wasn't enough time to sustain my existing levels of involvement in the league *and* adequately record what was happening. I didn't have enough energy to sustain my existing levels of involvement in the league *and* do research.

Making field-notes bought with it a set of tangible problems, how and when and where to do it, but the awkwardness of 'writing down what happened' also stands in for more theoretical, and felt, ambivalences in beginning to blur the boundaries between leisure and work. I spent much of my MSc year writing and talking about being a researcher and participant at the same time. The people, relationships, issues

and shared projects of the league that I was engaged in anyway, and that I was already implicated in creating, continued to be sources of relaxation, confusion, frustration, laughter, satisfaction and tears but playing and organizing roller derby swiftly became a research method and a source of data.

Late nights writing field-notes have come to stand in for the nugatory anxiety that characterized 'doing research', especially data collection that so evidently instated a change in my relation to the league. The awkwardness of shifts between playing roller derby *and* being 'in the field' comes from literally moving between positions; participation/research and leisure/work in attempts to productively inhabit the space in between. However, doing research established a new rationale for playing and organizing roller derby, a new end to already existing means. If I helped to start the league 'because we thought it would be fun' (Lady Garden, individual interview, March 2011), I also came to use my involvement in the league to generate data, publish articles, and to translate roller derby in to sociological terms.

I think that much of the anxiety I felt is attributable to this transition. Making field-notes, organizing them, analyzing them seemed an exercise in taking some of the bittersweet mundane confusion of daily life and working it into something else entirely, a narrative, a 200-word abstract, a career. The alienation in these processes was tangible. Making field-notes was one small but significant step in the process of extracting a research output from the mess of tangled limbs at practice, everyone speaking at once at meetings, and the jokes that don't quite make sense and making distinctions between what matters. Traversing between participation and research encourages attention to what gets left out of research in order to make it research.

I did not follow Lady Garden's suggestion to classify all time spent with roller derby as working hours. I didn't want to admit that playing and organizing roller derby was now 'work' and data for analysis. Doing a PhD was, in a sense, a way to earn a living through my involvement with roller derby, not professionalization exactly but a significant shift in the rationale for my involvement. But the implications of this were not something I wanted to face. The aim of doing research differently was reliant upon my 'insider' status and full participation in the league, but this position became harder and harder to maintain.

Pervasive unease *and* the potential for methodological engagement both coalesced around the task of moving between participation and research; blurring a distinction that informs and is reenacted in much research. In hindsight, the 'practical problem' of field-notes could have been addressed by any manner of solutions; I could have got a bum-bag… I could have used a microphone… In the next interstice I discuss how I didn't transcribe any interviews for 18 months; I think I was trying to avoid alienating 'research' from 'participation' by simply not doing it, or by putting it off for as long as possible. As months went by participating and researching at the same time became too much. After a particularly tense meeting with Sports & Training Committee in the spring of 2011, Lady Garden emailed me, 'don't just research us, you can make things better'. Making it better is integral to participation, to being a part of the league, but it was too much. I was becoming 'just' a researcher.

I could not let go of the idea of doing and accounting for research in which the ambivalences of its production were not bracketed off, research that was ambivalent about itself. Declining 'insiderness' accompanied by increased emphasis on 'doing research' conflicted with the initial aim of producing a 'thesis for people who don't like theses'. Just as participants have been occupied with how to play a sport that is different from and perhaps critical of sport in general *and* achieve serious recognition within terms that would exclude them, comparable dilemmas inhere in 'insider' research. Embarking on this project led to blurring distinctions between leisure and work, and introducing a new, 'serious' rationale for my involvement.

In the subsequent interstices I trace further points of connection as participants are increasingly occupied with 'getting taken seriously' and I am increasingly occupied with producing and finishing a thesis. Doing and accounting for research, especially the rationalization of my own roller derby participation, involves re-treading trajectories of getting taken seriously and questions of how seriousness is enacted in research practice. In the next interstice, which comes between Chapters 5 and 6, I focus on relations between emotion and seriousness in research as injury led me to hang up my skates permanently.

5. 'A Lot More Structured, And A Lot More Of A Sport': Making Sense of What The League Became

5.1 TEAM FOR 'TATTOO FREEZE' TOURNAMENT[6] JANUARY 2011 COURTESY OF IN-DEPTH PHOTOS & ARRG.

ST: I sometimes really worry that like really athletic people are going to be interested in roller derby…

T: And then we won't be able to play anymore.

ST: Yeah [laughs] and because obviously that is going to happen, and the level of skating's gonna get higher and higher, so I worry.

Sally Tape and Tilda, film-making workshop, September 2011

[6] Back row L-R: Ciderella; Tartan Tearaway; Bronx Betty; Crazylegs; Velosidy; Mallory Powers; Fay Bentos (MB). Front row L-R: Fight Cub; Crotch Lightning; Bruise Leigh; Alma Geddon; Mo B Quick; Zillah.

This chapter is about how skaters make sense of what roller derby became, of what the league is 'now', as the research draws to a close in 2012-13. After deciding to 'be competitive' participants were faced with how to organize the league in pursuit of winning games, how to put the value of competition into practice. As competition was instituted, participants' organizational practice continually raised and responded to questions of who belonged to the league, and how. Given the shift, from roller derby as 'sport for women who don't like sport' to the prospect of 'really athletic people' being 'interested in roller derby', I discuss 'what the league became', through an account of changes in *who* roller derby is for; in participants' understandings of membership and belonging.

I have argued elsewhere (Breeze, 2013b) that *getting taken seriously* can be fruitfully analyzed as a 'mode of ordering' (Law, 1994). Participants' desires for serious recognition become 'recursive ordering patterns' (ibid: 83) identifiable in 'specific strategies of reflexivity and self-reflexivity' (ibid: 107). Getting taken seriously informs decision-making processes and justifies some courses of action over others. I elaborate upon this analysis here, with a precise focus on the codification and enactment of *competition*. The chapter is thus an exercise in examining how participants' creation of bureaucracy had consequences for the limits and possibilities of their future practice, and their aspirations for what roller derby could, or should be.

The chapter considers firstly, how 'by the skaters, for the skaters' organization was instituted and codified, early on, into a 'committee structure', precipitated by the challenge of hosting a bout for the first time in January 2009. The conflicts and tensions clustered around this event continued to inform subsequent organizational shifts. The development of 'Fresh Meat' and team selection policies created new categories in the regulation of membership. Secondly, the development of an 'attendance policy' and quantified 'skill levels' produced finer grained distinctions between skaters, and more elaborate bureaucratic systems for measuring them. Thirdly, in 2011, as skaters restructured the league, into 'competitive' and 'recreational' wings, membership was organized according to a distinction between 'competitive' and 'non-competitive' skaters. The fourth section is concerned with

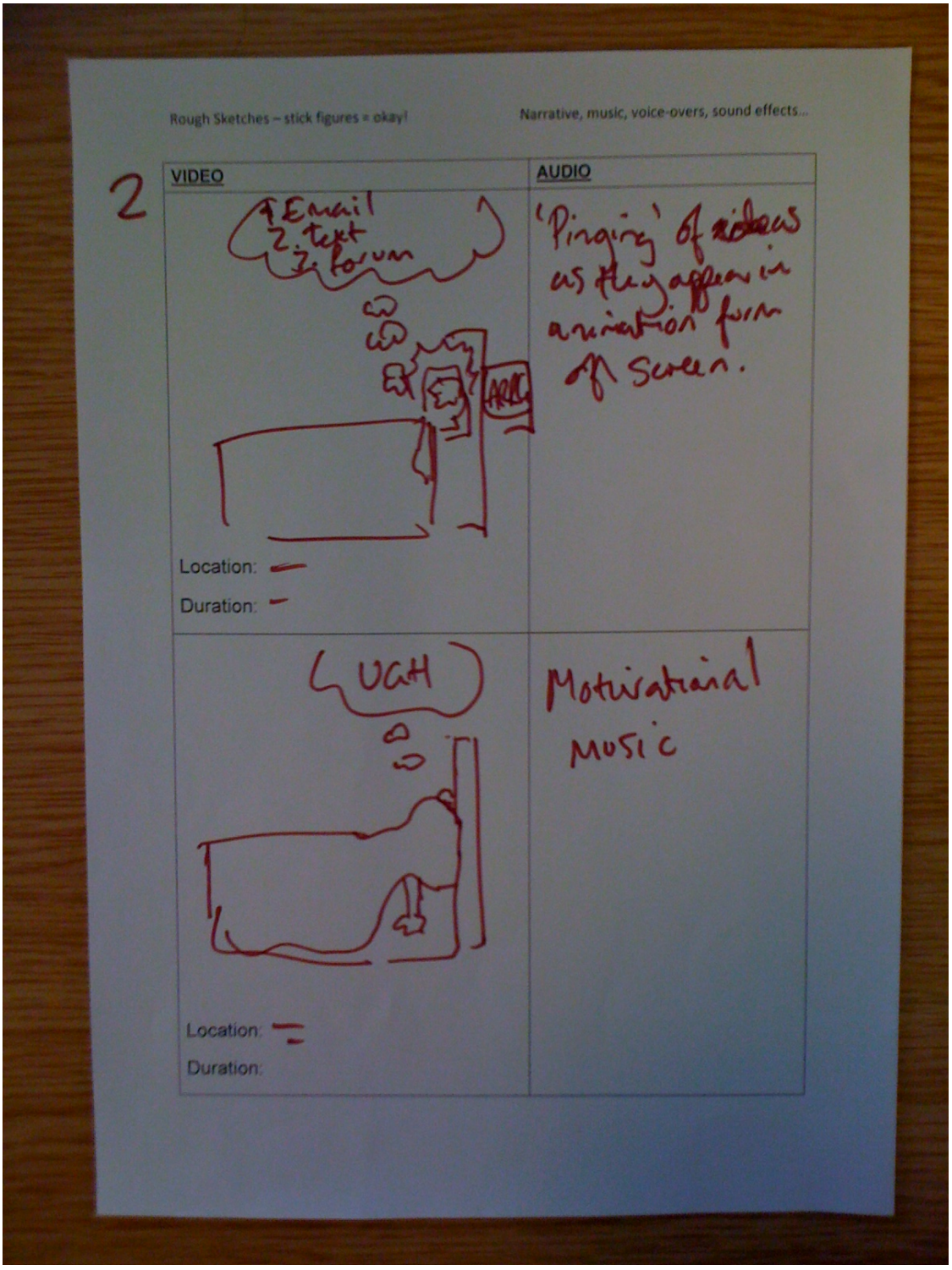
how in putting competitiveness into practice previously informal and implicit hierarchies were made explicit. The league continued to be run 'by the skaters, for the skaters', but the meaning of 'skaters' shifted, and was bureaucratically defined according to degree of competitiveness. The chapter concludes by discussing relationships between getting taken seriously and organizational change, and how, in reducing distinctions between roller derby and 'sport' distinctions *between skaters* proliferated, and the league appears to become what it was initially defined in opposition to.

5.1 A Committee Structure

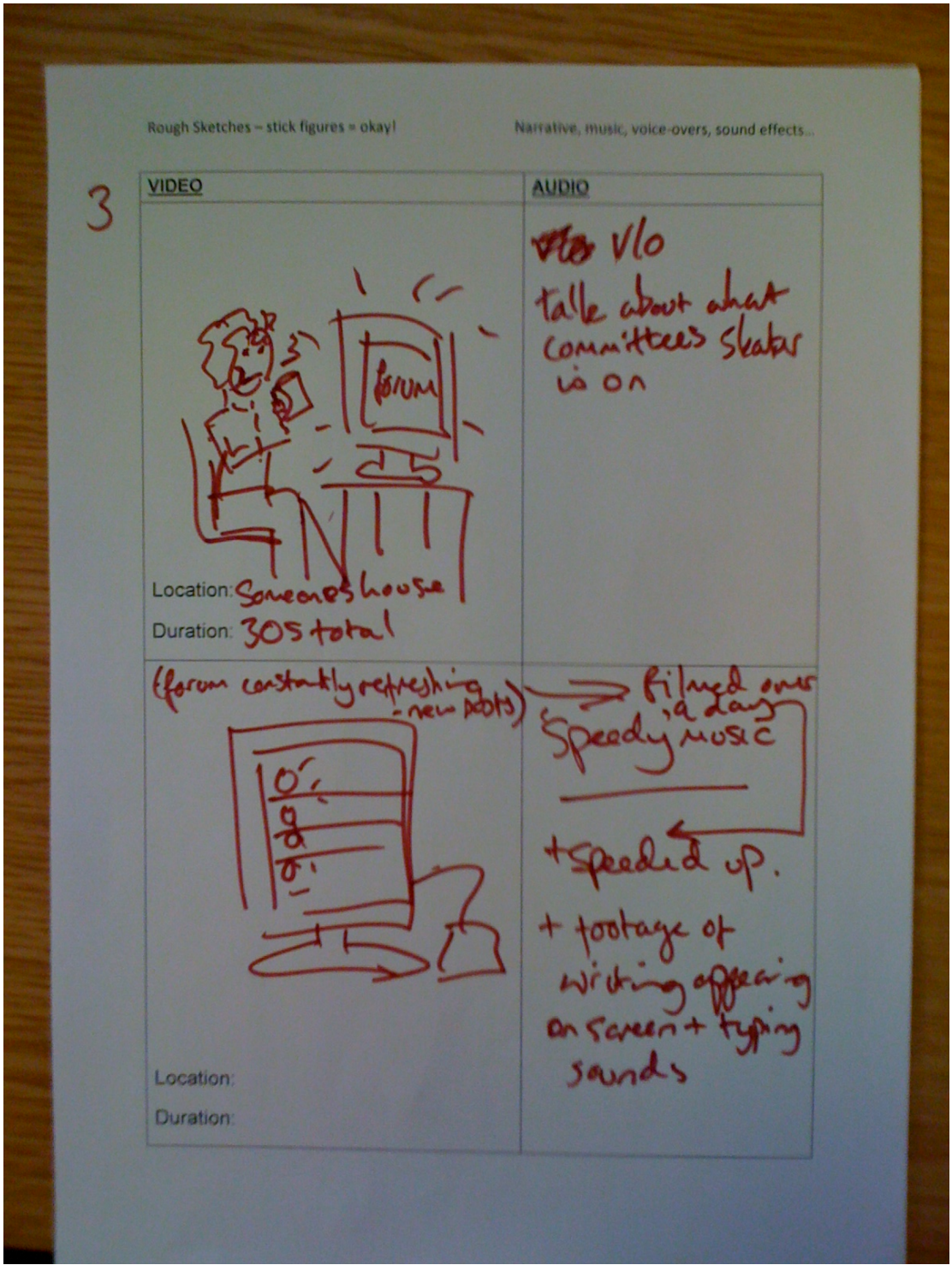
The league's first home bout, *Fishnet Burns Night*, took place in January 2009, was the first time skaters had worked together, not only to play, but to host a game. In hindsight the challenge of organizing the bout came to be seen as a crisis, or turning point in league organization, a catalyst for far-reaching change. A series of fraught meetings and online discussions took place in the months following the event, in which we evaluated our first attempt at organizing a bout. In these difficult and emotionally charged discussions we developed a new 'committee structure', one of the earliest key moments of organizational change, which in turn led to the development of membership and team selection policies as participants worked out how to organize themselves. I focus specifically on belonging, the organization of who roller derby is *by* and *for*.

The DIY organizational ethos of 'by the skaters, for the skaters' is a guiding principle of the Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA, 2013b), and an integral part of what participants say that roller derby is. Its centrality has remained constant throughout the research. Participants were adamant, 'we do it all ourselves', the league is 'not just like a club that we attend' (film-making workshop September 2011) and 'the hard work of running the league' developed into a key theme for the film. 'Roller derby takes over your life'; bouting, training, coaching, committee meetings and responsibilities, emails and the forum leaves one with little free time. Participants' storyboards were replete with stick figure drawings of sleeping skaters dreaming of all the league business they have to do, being woken up by the sound of

league emails and text messages, spending hours on the forum and using the photocopiers and internet access at their work for league business (figures 5.2-5.5).

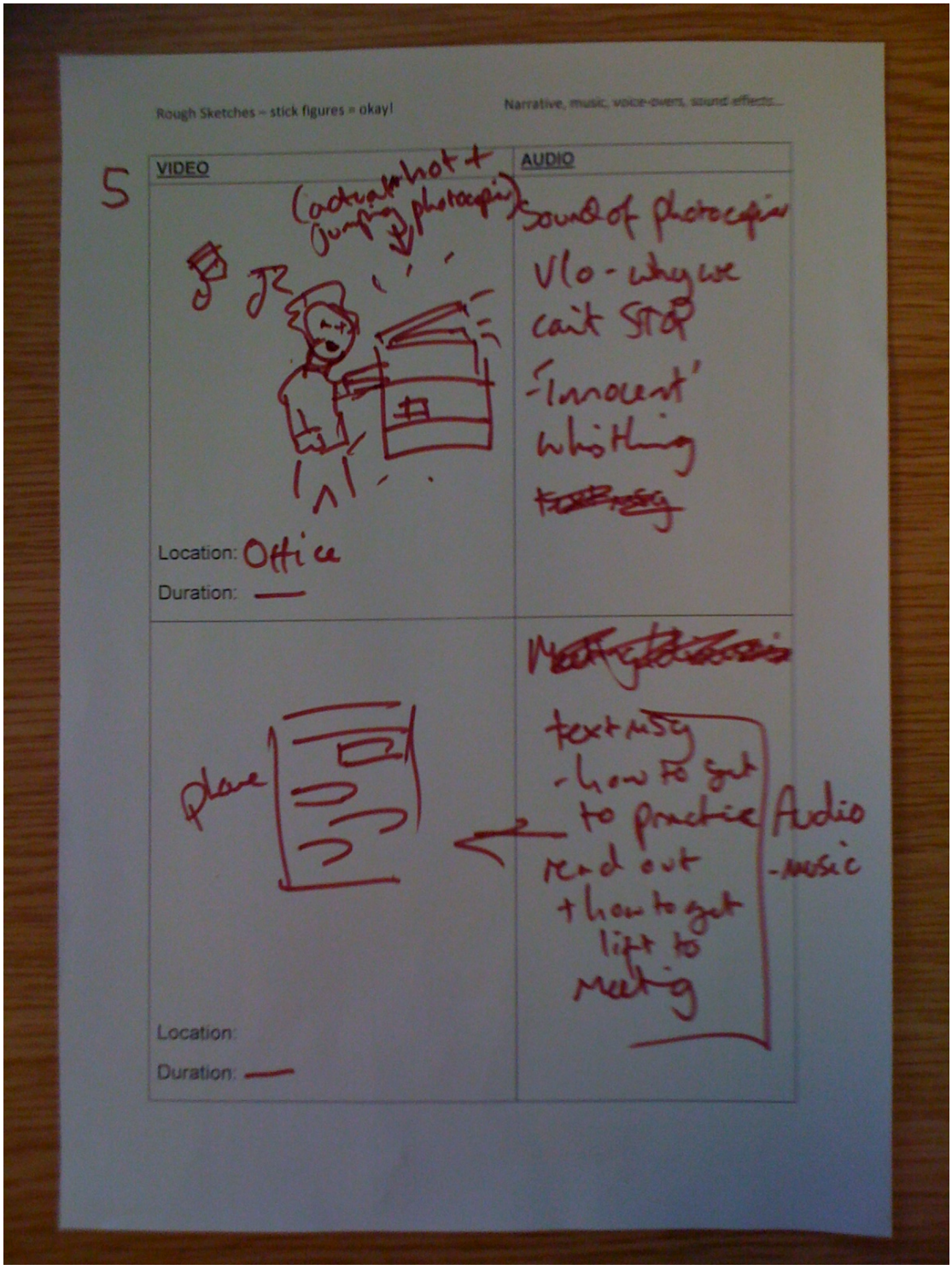


5.2 STORYBOARD FOR 'THE HARD WORK OF RUNNING THE LEAGUE', SEPTEMBER 2011. COURTESY OF TILDA.



5.3 STORYBOARD FOR 'THE HARD WORK OF RUNNING THE LEAGUE', SEPTEMBER 2011. COURTESY OF TILDA.

5.4 STORYBOARD FOR 'THE HARD WORK OF RUNNING THE LEAGUE', SEPTEMBER 2011. COURTESY OF TILDA.



5.5 STORYBOARD FOR 'THE HARD WORK OF RUNNING THE LEAGUE', SEPTEMBER 2011. COURTESY OF TILDA.

‘Doing it all ourselves’, the ways the league was managed and run, were, especially after *Fishnet Burns Night*, subject to a high level of deliberative, reflexive action. Lady Garden considers the attention that means, as well as aims and ends, receive:

> We had a vote about how we should vote, about how the vote should be structured, that’s amazing, right, that to me, right there, that is what [league] is.
>
> - Lady Garden, field-notes, August 2011

This level of reflexivity chimes with *modern* organization as ‘a practice that is aware of itself, conscious of being a conscious practice’ (Bauman, 1993: 5) and with Weberian conceptions of rational action (1978). Such dynamics were especially tangible in the weeks and months after *Fishnet Burns Night*, during which the league entered a fraught period of heightened internal critique in response to the challenges of organizing the bout.

On the day of the bout itself not enough liability waivers were printed out for all the skaters, referees, ‘jeerleaders’, and officials. There were spelling mistakes in the programmes. Skaters gave away tickets to family and friends and didn’t collect money for them. We didn’t pay the printers on time. We didn’t pay the emergency medical technicians. The hall was too small to lay a full sized track and there wasn’t enough room to erect a safety barrier between skaters and the wall of abrasive breezeblocks, or between the track and the 300 strong audience. Those who volunteered to lay the track, didn't. The PA system didn’t work properly. The week before the bout was full of tearful phone-calls, last-minute panics, and stressed-out late nights sewing tartan mini-skirts for a whole team. I remember feeling overwhelmed with the sheer number of tasks that needed to be completed and coordinated, as well as by the misunderstandings and dissatisfactions that burgeoned as skaters made decisions without consulting others, as multiple people took on responsibilities in the same area unbeknownst to each other, or as jobs simply did not get done.

Owlison's recollections reiterate the 'shambolic' and 'ramshackle' character of early organization (Chapter 4), and emphasize the lack of clearly defined roles and shared responsibilities:

> Well, obviously, a big event was our first public bout, and like our committee structure grew from that basically, because it had been like one or two people doing a lot of jobs and then things had gone wrong and people got a lot of flak for it that maybe they shouldn't have, like I was getting shouted at by the manager of [sports center] that day and I had nothing to do with it, like I hadn't booked the hall or anything like that, I didn't know what they were talking about…
>
> - Owlison, individual interview, June 2011

Owlison was not the only one to 'get a lot of flak'. Emotions were running high and in response I worked alongside other skaters to compile written feedback, from everyone involved, on the processes and outcomes of bout organization. I then facilitated a meeting in which skaters both aired their grievances and discussed how to improve the organization of future bouts. As concerns, complaints and constructive criticisms were raised, discontent spread out beyond the event itself to how the whole league was organized more broadly:

> League management also needs to be well-structured, clear, accessible and accountable, with clearly defined roles for committee members and clear lines of communication between groups working in different areas.
>
> - extract from anonymized summary of post-bout feedback, February 2009

The meeting itself lasted three hours. Jess left in a flood of tears. I cried a lot in the weeks after the bout; it feels silly to say it now, but it was stressful, lots of people were really upset and it felt as if the whole league might fall apart. Tensions crystalized around the way that teams were selected, and a lack of clarity and transparency for set roles and responsibilities. Team selection was done by one or two individuals, with no broader discussion of how or why. That 'one or two people [were] doing a lot of jobs' engendered responses from discomfort to outrage, as skaters discussed uneven distributions of responsibility, and power; it was *unfair*. Others were exasperated by the lack of co-ordination, the left hand did not know

what the right hand was doing; it was *inefficient*. Another way of saying this is that league organization suffered from a lack of legitimacy.

In response to these issues, after many long email conversations and further, often strained, meetings, skaters collaborated on designing a new organizational model for the league. Committees were created for every area of responsibility: 'Sports & Training', 'Secretarial', 'Bout Management', 'Finance', 'Merchandise', 'Web', 'Referees' and 'New Skaters' to name but a few. Skaters volunteered to join committees, and elected their representative or 'Spokesperson', who in turn sat on the Spokesperson's Committee or 'Spokesies' which met once a month. A 'Board' was also inaugurated, consisting of two Co-Chairs, voted for by the whole league, alongside a Treasurer and a Secretary; the spokespeople of 'Finance' and 'Secretarial' committees.

The system arose in response to a diffuse set of aims; that there should be a democratic process for filling key roles, positions of leadership and responsibility were now subject to votes; that there should be clear demarcations of responsibility and delegation, individuals were now designated to oversee each specific area of league operation (Spokespeople) and the functioning of the league as a whole (the Board); that there should be clear channels of communication, Spokespeople were responsible for acting as a link between their committee and the league as a whole, via monthly Spokespeople's meetings. The new committee structure was intended to make 'by the skaters, for the skaters' league organization fairer and more efficient.

In the following months and years a common response to skaters who complained about some aspect of the league, most often team selection, was that they should join the relevant committee and make sure their views were represented. 'By the skaters, for the skaters' was often interpreted as meaning that each skater had a stake in, and a responsibility for, the way the league is run:

> I think the whole ethos of doing it, by the skaters for the skaters, for me it seems more, much more enjoyable because you can control what you're doing, you know you can control the direction that you're going in and you can give everybody a say and if people maybe aren't happy you can look at addressing what would make them happy and could we change

> the league in any way to try and make them happy.
>
> - The Beefcake, individual interview, October 2010
>
> I think one of the reasons why roller derby has such a good sense of community is the whole 'by the skaters, for the skaters' thing, which says for me that most people who have something to do with the official stuff or setting up rules or things like that has either played or tried to play and really wanted to be part of the league, whereas like the AFL [Australian Football League] wasn't so much like that, there's rules and things and an officiating body for the sport so then you get rules that you didn't necessarily agree with or maybe were set up for the men's league that didn't translate so well to the women's and stuff like that.
>
> - Ophelia, group interview, May 2011

The league is thus articulated as an expression of collective will. The inauguration of the committee structure was in part an institution of previously un-codified DIY principles that in practice meant that 'one or two people' did 'a lot of jobs'. Establishing a system of committees formalized 'by the skaters, for the skaters', no longer 'shambolic', DIY organization became a 'more structured' system of agreed upon roles, responsibilities and relationships. Moreover, voting systems and policy documents instated new forms of legal-rational authority, for instance for selecting teams, which had previously rested on contested forms of charismatic authority (Weber, 1958). The league's constitution (appendix viii) was amended accordingly (appendix ix).

In establishing committees, skaters reflected on broader areas for organizational improvement. How new skaters joined and were integrated to the league, and how 14 skaters were chosen to be on a team, were two preeminent and on-going areas of contention, 'drama' and 'tears before bedtime' (field-notes, November 2011). While it was clear that these issues should be approached 'by the skaters, for the skaters', the specificities what this meant in practice were yet to be agreed or formalized:

> It always seems a bit messy and rushed when new skaters come along, we haven't worked out a great way of integrating them yet, both in terms of skating and socially.
>
> Perhaps we need to have a more structured plan for coaching newer

skaters.

> Do we need something to act as a stamp of validation for new skaters to prove that they have passed minimum standards[7]? It would be good to have a checklist to make sure nothing gets left out.
>
> - extracts from anonymized summary of post-bout feedback, February 2009

The question here is how to organize membership. In 2009 training sessions increase, from two to three per week. While previously new skaters were invited to come along at *any* time, the Sunday session was now designated as the only practice new skaters or 'Fresh Meat' could join. I consider the subsequent development of a Fresh Meat Programme in section 5.3, but the central point here is that membership and recruitment became subject to rule-governed, policy-based regulation. A 'Membership Policy' (appendix x) was written and voted in, and was subject to revisions as skaters continued to debate who did, and should, belong to the league and how. Membership was now bureaucratically defined, regulated and rationalized, no longer simply a matter of coming along and having a go. The group was now *formally* bounded, and distinctions between who does and does not belong were made more explicit than ever before.

The issue of team selection was the occasion for similar tensions and comparable shifts:

> There was a lack of explanation of how skaters were chosen to be on the team.
>
> Personal issues can influence team selection rather than it being based on things like skill or fitness or reliability.
>
> - extracts from anonymized summary of post-bout feedback, February 2009

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[7] 'Minimum standards' refers to the WFTDA minimum skills assessment. At this point the league used these criteria to assess whether a skater was safe to bout, this was one of the few visible and agreed-upon criteria for team selection.

In March 2009 Sports & Training Committee held their first meeting. In April the Board discussed the rife uncertainty over team selection. In the first week of May the Spokespeoples' Committee requested that Sports & Training create a formal set of guidelines for team selection. In the second week Owlison sent round a proposal for team selection policy, detailing who would be responsible for selecting teams and how (appendix xii). The eventual policy set out how five people from Sports & Training Committee, two fixed, three rotating, would form a selection committee four weeks in advance of each bout. The document detailed the criteria skaters must meet to be *eligible* for team selection: having passed a yearly WFTDA minimum skills assessment, paying monthly membership fees, having signed a liability waiver and adhering to the league's Code of Conduct.

The selection crew were to give every eligible skater a score, between 1-5, on five *selection* criteria set out in the policy: 'attendance at practice', 'effort and commitment', 'sportswomanship', 'health and safety' and 'growth and development'. The 14 skaters with the highest scores would be offered a place on the team. The policy grew from dissatisfaction with the 'drama' that characterized previous team selections and the priority was for a transparent, 'democratic' and de-personalized procedure. Notably there were no criteria orientated towards 'skill' or 'competitiveness' in this first substantiation of the policy. However, team selection proved to be the focal point of on-going contention, and the fledgling policy was subject to subsequent revisions as skaters continued to debate what values should guide the process and how these should be put in to practice.

The development of rule-governed approaches to membership and team selection was about providing routine answers to questions of belonging: How can we tell if someone is a member? Should they be on the team? If so, why so? If not, why not? Participants made connections between DIY organization, interwoven with roller derby as a 'women's sport', and values of *inclusivity*, or 'fairness'. In some cases participants asserted that 'inclusivity' was a defining feature of roller derby and the league:

> With every other sport it's like men came up with it, and then you can play like women's football, but all the structures are already there, but

> with roller derby it's so ground up, this is how women decided to do it, and it's, it has inclusivity as an essential element.
>
> - SF, film-making workshop, September 2011

Whilst 'inclusivity' is something of a watchword in the league, there are a number of factors that compromise this in practice (Breeze, 2013b):

> But I think, like I mean personally, I aim for the league to be more inclusive and community orientated, and I think we're not as inclusive as we might like to be or as I would like it to be at the moment, in terms of things like you know we can't offer a crèche, so we're not that inclusive to single parents… I mean I hadn't even considered the colour aspect of things, but we are, 'cause I think we are predominantly, exclusively white, are we?
>
> MB: Yeah I think so yeah
>
> … Is that, is roller derby quite a middle class sport, I'm not sure I dunno, I think it's maybe getting more so,
>
> MB: Yeah I think especially maybe that free time you have to have,
>
> And money, it's quite an expensive sport as well, so yeah in fact it's quite exclusive then, basically it's open to anyone who can get there, so you have to have transport or money to pay for transport, anyone who can pay thirty odd quid a month plus buy kit, plus skates, plus wheels, and who can give up that time, so yeah just quite middle class, white, educated women.
>
> - Orville, individual interview, June 2011

Orville's reflection here suggests that class and economic resources structure access to the league; roller derby is an expensive and time-consuming hobby (Beaver, 2012: 44). The league's inclusivity is compromised by the lack of a crèche; playing roller derby competitively, if at all, is harder for those with parenting or caring responsibilities. The league's membership is overwhelmingly white, and there is no provision for participants with physical disabilities.

Nevertheless, 'inclusivity' continues to be an ideal, albeit a contested one, in league organization, and is somewhat of a buzzword in participants' accounts of what

distinguishes roller derby from other forms of sport. 'Competition' developed a similar status as an ideal towards which league organization was orientated, as a marker of roller derby's *similarity* to other forms of sport and to sport in general. In the integration of new members and in team selection inclusivity and competition came to be competing values, whose relation changed and was negotiated, as roller derby becomes 'more of a sport':

> I think the inclusivity thing gets harder and harder because if you look at the way that we do things it's already starting to be contentious, in terms of having to limit Fresh Meat Programmes because we're full, like you know we can't take anyone else right now, and that in itself is obviously causing a lot of upset, but we're doing everything we can to try and, keep it at a stage where new people who aren't professional athlete standard can still join, people who can't skate at all can still join, and then if you look at American leagues that are quite high up the actual rankings, then with them if you want to join you have to go and teach yourself to play roller derby then try-out you know, so that just shows you, that's evidently not as inclusive as [league] but that's the stage that they've got to and I just wonder like at what point you know is that gonna happen to [league]?
>
> - Tiny Chancer, film-making workshop, September 2011

How, or indeed if, to strike a balance between inclusivity and competition was an on-going and emotionally charged debate in participants' increasingly rule-governed approaches to integrating new members and doing team selection. I now turn to two specific examples of these bureaucratic excretions, the development of an 'attendance policy' and of 'skill level' criteria in team selection policy.

5.2 Attendance & Skill Level in Team Selection

Since its introduction in 2009 the team selection policy was repeatedly amended, as participants created increasingly fine-grained and quantifiable distinctions between skaters that *probably should* be on the team from those that *possibly shouldn't.* In these revisions issues of 'attendance' and 'skill' were subject to much deliberative attention during meetings, forum discussions and email exchanges throughout 2010 and 2011. In this section I focus on the bureaucratic codification of *inclusivity* and *competition* in an 'attendance policy' and 'skill level criteria'. The league increased

in organizational complexity, bouted more and more, and claims for serious recognition and roller derby's similarity to 'sport' crystalized around 'playing to win'.

Since team selection had been encoded in policy in 2009, Secretarial Committee recorded skaters' attendance at practice. In a series of meetings, discussions and votes, among the Board, Spokespeoples' Committee, Sports & Training Committee and the league as a whole, the 'attendance at practice' criterion in team selection policy was shifted, from one of the five criteria that eligible skaters were rated on, to a *standard of eligibility in itself*; a standard of qualification to be included in the selection process (appendix xiii). At the same time, and in response to burgeoning levels of membership, the league developed a second team. There were now 'A' and 'B' 'travel teams', both competing against teams from other leagues. An attendance level of over 60% for the 'A' team and 50% for the 'B' team became mandatory for a skater to qualify to even be considered for team selection.

The justification for this shift was that a base level of regular participation at practice was necessarily for the development of fitness, tactical knowledge, team-spirit and skill, and was an expression of skaters' commitment to the league and to roller derby. There was a sense in which this was about *fairness*, a mechanism for recognizing skaters who put in a lot of effort and consistently turned up to train. Attendance as a standard of eligibility was intended as check and balance, so that skaters would not be able to maintain a place on the team by having a reputation as the 'best' or most skilled; consistent attendance at practice was essential for skaters who wanted to make the team. Those skaters who maintained a high level of attendance, irrespective of *skill*, were given the opportunity to be selected on to a travel team.

Attendance was conceptualized and measured in increasingly fine detail, as team selection policy was supplemented by a new 'attendance policy' (appendix xiv), developed and administrated by Secretarial Committee. Rather than simply recording presence and absence, skaters were awarded 0, 1 or 2 points for each practice that ran. Secretarial Committee designed, and remained responsible for updating, a large

spreadsheet, shared online, that calculated each skaters' percentage attendance scores (figure 5.6).

MAY Wed 1	Fri 3	TT vs Hotwhe	Sun 5	Wed 8	Fri 10	Sun 12	Wed 15	Fri 17	Belles/la 3 months	Belles vs Vienna	Sun 19	Wed 22	Fri 24	Sun 26	Wed 29	Fri 31
		2		2		2		2	17		2	1	2	2	2	2
2					2				8	2			2		2	2
	1	2			2	2	2		19		2		2	2		2
2	1		2	2		2	2	2	27		2	2	2	2	2	
2	2		2	2	2		2	2	29	2	2	2		2		
	1	2					2	1	13	2	2	2	2	2		2
2			2	2	2				17		2	2		2	2	
2	1	2		2	2*		2	2	23			2	2	2	2	1

FIGURE 5.6 SMALL PORTION OF THE 'ATTENDANCE SPREADSHEET' (SKATER NAMES REMOVED) SEPTEMBER 2013. COURTESY OF ARRG.

Each row on the spreadsheet shows the points awarded to an individual skater, with columns for every session that points could be awarded for. Skaters' percentage attendance score was calculated at strategic intervals, three months before a bout, and it is this figure that was used in team selection. Full participation in practice, defined in detail in the policy, was awarded two points. Skaters who arrived late, left early or sat out of drills would only achieve one point. Skaters could also earn one attendance point if they were missing practice because they were engaged in another derby related activity: for example skating in a bout, or joining in with another league's practice while they were out of town (see appendix vix for a full breakdown).

'Attendance' is a good example of codification and quantification in league organization. More than simply measuring how often skaters came to practice, the attendance policy made it possible to draw increasingly elaborate and quantified distinctions between each skater. Team selection became increasingly rule-governed, far from being the murky, unexplained process subject to 'personal issues' of 2009, now it was a case of following clear, agreed upon, subject to amendments, procedure; 'the reduction of ambivalence is a managerial problem.' (Bauman 1993: 3). The ways that distinctions were drawn between skaters, the differences between

achieving one or two points, are the result of skaters' own collaborative action, developed by committees tasked with representing the league as a whole. These criteria, so evidently constructed by skaters themselves came to be thought of as objective measurements, a fair and impartial way to make distinctions. The consequences of the bureaucratization and routinization of team selection reverberates through skaters' practice and comes to matter in new ways.

In 2011 as the number of weekly practices increased, and as an emphasis on competition escalated, Board members, committee Spokespeople and Team Captains were regularly sending emails to the whole league, emphasizing the importance of regular and high levels of attendance, and full participation at practice. Attendance tracking came to be a tool for encouraging skaters to increase their levels of attendance and participation. All league members could view the online spreadsheet, their attendance scores were public, and the intention was that the ability to check one's own score and compare it to others provided motivation for skaters to attend more practices and participate fully at each one.

In the summer of 2011 I hung out at Felicity's and Sally Tape's flat before practice, as we got ready to leave Felicity fretted 'when did it get like this?' She says that she used to go to practice 'because I wanted to skate', but that 'now I go because I know my attendance wont be good enough and I need the points'. In this instance the meaning of going to practice and playing roller derby started to shift. Although Felicity only 'needs the points' because she *wanted* to be on the team, going to practice becomes something done, in part, because of attendance points. In pursuit of organizing team selection 'fairly' administrative bureaucracy proliferated. Playing roller derby is somewhat rationalized and becomes instrumental, as instituting transparency and efficiency generated The Attendance Spreadsheet and a need for skaters to accumulate 'enough' attendance points to be eligible for team selection.

Attendance points, a series of 1s and 2s in rows on a spreadsheet, quantify skaters' participation, articulate their commitment and culminate in individual percentage attendance scores. Those with a score of 50% or more are eligible to be considered in the team selection process for the 'B' team, those with 60% or more are eligible for selection on to the 'A' team. Developing the attendance policy was a question of

how to encode and enact an ideal of 'fairness' or *inclusivity*. Even as team selection is about inclusion, it is also about exclusion and the definition of boundaries. At the same time, the introduction of a 'skill level' criterion in team selection is an instance of *competition* being put into organizational practice and a further example of proliferating bureaucratically administrated distinctions between skaters.

In September 2011, as the league completed their WFTDA apprenticeship and became full members of the organization, emphasis on competition continued to increase. 'A' Team Captains, and Sports & Training Committee gave increasing priority to selecting skaters on to a team with a view to winning. Alabama Thunder Fuck explains:

> Becoming WFTDA is serious business, it's very complicated and it's a massive ask and it takes time, it takes commitment, it takes the fact that you now openly admit you're gonna start playing for rankings, and that is an attitude change.
>
> - Alabama Thunder Fuck

Full WFTDA membership meant that the league would feature, alongside teams from the USA, in WFTDA rankings. Bout results, winning and by how much, now mattered in a new way. It was in such an atmosphere that 'skill level' was developed and added as a criterion to an amended team selection policy, in October 2011. Sports & Training Committee devised five skill level descriptors, setting out the characteristics of each (appendix xiii). This was the first time that a concept of 'skill' had been codified in team selection, done with a view to making the team more competitive.

It was agreed that the 'A' Team should consist of skaters rated at levels four and five; '4-5 skill level skaters will be fielded first onto the WFTDA 20 provided attendance has been met' (from 'ARRG Team Selection Policy, October 2011 update', appendix xiii). Again much was made of how the skill level criteria were a way to 'objectively measure' (Sway, field-notes, October 2011) differences between skaters. Skill thus came to matter in new ways. Eligible skaters were now given a skill-level score by the Team Selection Crew. At the same time, Sports & Training Committee members' eligibility to stand on the 'selection crew' itself became

another instance of the institutionalization of competition. Only 'experienced' skaters, who had themselves skated on the 'A' team, were now eligible to be on the selection crew; 'The other 2 spaces will be filled on a rotational basis by eligible skaters' (from 'ARRG Team Selection Policy, October 2011 update', appendix xiii).

Team selection was repeated on a regular basis, done afresh for every bout, and each time another round of fraught discussion erupted as to the balance between fielding a 'fair' and a 'competitive' team. For instance, some skaters achieved consistently high 'attendance' scores, putting them in line for a spot on the team, and yet their 'skill level' prevented this from happening. In the discussions among the selection team it was increasingly common to hear 'it's just a sport, what more can we say?' and 'I'm sure other sports don't have to go through this rigmarole' (field-notes, November 2011). In a broader discussion of the balance between 'competitiveness' and 'fairness' Sway suggests that since 'premiership football teams "bench players"', it would be okay for the league to adopt a similar approach (field-notes, April 2011).

The proliferation of policy and procedure for team selection as skaters organize competition is one manifestation of the league becoming 'more structured' and 'more of a sport'. The policies surrounding team selection tell stories of an increasingly rationalized approach to playing roller derby, and the creation of increasingly fine bureaucratically administrated distinctions between skaters. Team selection is done according to a DIY, 'by the skaters, for the skaters' model, in which skaters grapple with which values to codify, and how, in their organizational practice. Competitiveness or 'winning games' and inclusivity or 'fairness' have all been idealized in participants' definitions of roller derby, and that have coincided in league practice:

> I think we're moving towards being more focused on "this is for the win, we need to play our hearts out", but there's another element of making sure that perhaps newer people on the team are supported and feel comfortable and they know that if they do something wrong its not the end of the world, I don't think perhaps you'd get that on like a, a professional level sports team [laughing] like "its alright lovely, you might just get played twice but we'll all support you and, you know [laughing] and if you do something wrong its fine" [laughing]

> - The Beefcake, individual interview, October 2010

However, competition and inclusivity were increasingly seen as conflicting:

> We're not that inclusive to people who are basically never going to be any good at it because we can't cater to them at the moment, but you know it would be nice to be able to,
>
> - Orville, individual interview, June 2011

As when Alabama considers the 'attitude change' of 'openly playing for rankings', in 2011 there was a sense that inclusivity was where the league began, and competitiveness was where it is going:

> I think the problem is, the problem is that the word 'sport' is used in a bunch of non-defined ways to mean a bunch of non-defined things, to mean, depending on what the context is, you know 'no no it's a sport, of course we can't keep everyone happy', or you know 'it's a sport so that means you have to work hard' but what they mean is, what we really mean is, something like 'we want to win'… sport is something that we deploy in the context of roller derby, it's like a code for these most problematic things, in other sports you know, it's about winning, but instead of saying all these things matter, instead of saying 'how good you are matters', we say 'it's a sport', and that hides the fact that we're sneaking all these things back in, which we thought might not matter…
>
> - Lady Garden, individual interview, March 2011

The trajectory that skaters trace on the way to roller derby being-and-becoming real, serious, sport is similar to well-rehearsed processes of bureaucratization or the idea that rationalism drives out naïve communism (Michels, 1959). To borrow from and bastardize Orwell, while skaters remained equal, some became more equal than others. Instituting competition droves this, but without competition the chances of roller derby's recognition as a *sport* as very slim indeed. I now move on to consider 'what the league became' in terms of changes to the induction of new members and the development of distinctions between not just who belongs to the league, but the form of such belonging, as skaters institute a division between 'competitive' and 'non-competitive' skaters.

5.3 'Competitive' & 'Non-competitive' Skaters

In 2013 I worked with Lady Garden to make a zine featuring the transcript from her (2011) interview. In the introduction she writes for the zine she emphasized, 'these days I am much more focused on improving my skating, making teams, winning bouts and so on. I guess the sport has shaped me!' (April 2013). Over the years competitiveness has taken on ever more importance, and is particularly manifest in the organization of membership, especially in distinctions between skaters and procedures for joining the league. As membership boundaries solidified, practice sessions were increasingly divided according to 'skill level' and there was conflict over resources; over who the league is for.

The league's Fresh Meat practices shifted, from their inauguration in early 2009 when they were simply the weekly slots that any 'newer' and 'less experienced' skaters could go to whenever they liked, to a structured, regulated programme by 2010. With this move the *only* practice potential new members could turn up to and join was the first of the programme, 'Fresh Meat Sunday'. Over 2010 and 2011 the programme increased in length, growing from 8, then 12, and eventually to 16 weeks, of focused training for two hours every Sunday. In 2011 interest out-stripped the number of skaters that could be accommodated in one session, and New Skaters Committee created a waiting list, that soon ran to 100 names. With the longer duration of Fresh Meat potential new skaters could be waiting up to six months or a year before they could come to their first practice; it was no longer a case of simply turning up and having a go.

In 2010 SJ and other members of New Skaters Committee would set up a table in the foyer area of the Jack Kane Sports Center, ticking off names from their list. The nervous 'new meat' were assigned a 'buddy', an experienced skater who would take them through to the hall and lend them their own kit, often still wet with sweat. Once kitted up, buddies would help new meat to their feet, and literally hold their hands as they took their first strides on skates. Each week at Fresh Meat new skaters would be taught a new skill, and when the eight weeks were over they joined in with the main league practices on Wednesdays and Fridays. In 2011 however, the 'buddy system'

was bought to a close, and a new stipulation made; new skaters would have to have their own kit, skaters would no longer lend equipment out:

> MB: why do you think we stopped lending out kit?
>
> Well people didn't like lending out their kit, and we found that people were more committed when they bought their own, and it reduced the waiting list… the thing is we can't deal with the numbers, we need to keep a league that people can join, and we need to look after the ones that are there…
>
> - Lady Garden, individual interview, March 2011

In the first year of the league the boundaries between 'Fresh Meat' and the rest of the league were not strictly delineated, skaters could be 'members' from their first practice, and the only explicit or official distinction was between those skaters who had passed their WFTDA minimums assessment, and so were considered safe to bout and those who had not. This changed with the advent of a membership policy (appendix x), which in 2011, after the league became a full WFTDA member, was amended (appendix xi). The most significant change to membership at this point was the formalization of the new stipulation that skaters must pass the WFTDA Minimum Standards skills test *before* they could become members of the league.

'Minimum Standards', and their assessment in the final two weeks of the Fresh Meat programme became a test that all skaters had to pass, in order to 'graduate' and become a member of the league. Unsurprisingly, standards assessments dominated the accounts of many Fresh Meat skaters, as did the prospect of 'moving up' and joining in with what some new skaters called 'big girl practices': 'I knew there were things that I was really struggling with… and you're doing a test, I mean I don't like any sort of test so the idea of it was very intimidating' (BBT, individual interview, May 2011). If a skater didn't pass their standards they could not become a full member of the league, but would re-take the Fresh Meat Programme and try again, at the next standards assessment, which eventually meant waiting another 16 weeks. AY remembers being about to skate 25 laps in five minutes for the first time:

> It was my third attempt of the day, and it was the last time before they were going to start doing the 16 weeks of fresh meat and I was like "I

> think I might die a little bit inside if I have to do the 16 weeks"… then at the end when everyone was stretching TC was just like "do you want to give it a go on your own?" and she skated with me and she made me do five laps every minute and we got to the end and she was like "yeah you managed it!" and I just fell on the floor I was so happy… and that was definitely my proudest moment because it took so long, so long just to do that one frigging thing, that was the one thing that was holding me back… it was just like "I'm never going to get it", I genuinely thought I was never going to get it and then it happened and it was like "yes I got the laps!"
>
> - AY, individual interview, May 2011

The formalization of minimum skills testing as a requirement for membership was an unprecedented development, but it took place alongside and within the ongoing evolution of an increasingly structured, rule-governed induction period. At the same time as distinctions between 'Fresh Meat skaters' and full league members became more defined, practice sessions became increasingly stratified according to experience and skill level, and there were conflicts over resources, over the *kind of skater* that the league was for.

In the first half of 2010 the league hired seven hours of hall hire per week, in three sessions. One was for Fresh Meat (Sunday), and the other two were for everyone else, one designated 'intermediate' (Wednesday) the other 'advanced' (Friday). Initially there was little difference between these two sessions and no strict boundaries between them. Every other Friday was designated as 'Bout Night', when all skaters who had passed their minimum skills would split into teams and compete against each other for the whole three-hour session. Skaters who had been playing roller derby for three years practiced alongside those who had been playing it for three months.

As 2010 progressed into 2011, Sports & Training Committee discussions were increasingly marked by concerns with over-crowded practices, and with differences in 'skill level'. Injuries were seen as the result of skaters practicing at the 'wrong' level, or of skaters with diverse skill levels and experience practicing together. AY suffered a bad break in her ankle at her first bout night. By the end of 2011 a total of six skaters had broken their legs. More hall time was hired so that practices could be

split according to skill level, an extra four hours on Sundays and one hour on Wednesdays. After achieving full WFTDA membership, Sports & Training Committee increasingly stressed the importance of the 'A' team practicing alone, to focus on up-coming competitions, without the distraction of skaters at different levels of skill and experience. An additional assessment was introduced, in order for a skater to be qualified to attend 'Bout Night'; it was no longer sufficient to have passed a minimum standards test. A new distinction was introduced; to participate in bout nights skaters were to be assessed as 'bout ready'.

In spring 2011, Referees Committee maintained the argument that *all* minimums-passed skaters should be eligible to skate at 'bout nights'. Attendance at bout nights had been low, and on more than one occasion there hadn't been enough skaters to form two teams. Referees were getting frustrated as smaller teams meant more penalties as skaters tired quickly and got sloppy. Bout nights were important to the league's refs as one of the only opportunities *they* got to practice refereeing. Sports & Training Committee however, decided against this suggestion. The discussion focused on the safety issues that were seen to arise from discrepancies in skill level, and many skaters were adamant: 'we need to focus practice according to the level of skill of skaters' (field-notes, May 2011). The conclusion was that the stratification should remain; only skaters that had been assessed, by Sports & Training Committee, as 'bout ready' could attend bout nights.

Bureaucratically enacted distinctions, instituted with a view to furthering the competitiveness of the league, but also with regards to the safety of all skaters, designated distinct groups. Feelings of unfairness are endemic at every level. The Board are centrally occupied with finding a solution to what are posed as urgent problems of growing numbers of skaters, limited resources and restricted places on the two 'A' and 'B' teams, how to focus attention of the development of skaters at all levels, and especially how to increase the competitiveness of the 'A' Team. Fred & Wilma consider the different amount of practice time the league provides for different categories of skater:

F: It's 9-7-2

MB: What's that?

F: The 'A' Team get 9 hours, intermediate skaters get 7, newbies get 2, so I don't think there's an equality of membership, you've got different people paying the same amount of money, the intermediate skater pays the same amount as a 'A' Team skater, and there's a lot of pissed off people in the league

W: people are coming and talking to me about how unhappy they are

MB: it seems like everyone is pissed off, even the 'A' Team

F: advanced skaters are getting the most out of everyone, I think advanced skaters are pissed off because they expect everyone else to turn up with the same drive as them, and you know, when refs came up with the idea of bout nights, the idea was bout night is for everyone basically, you come along and you play roller derby, you might never play a bout if you're not ever going to make it on to a team, so we have bout night, where everyone gets to play roller derby, but now what they've done is they've said "no well you're not *bout ready*, you haven't done this and you haven't done that…" so the 'A' Team get the maximum amount of track time and stuff like that, so it's like alright then, the club's for the 'A' Team, the club is just there for the 'A' Team, just there to support the 'A' Team, in my opinion it shouldn't be like that, it should be equally for everyone.

- Fred & Wilma paired interview, June 2011

At the end of that summer, when Fresh Meat reached its final weeks, the programme did not re-start as usual. The Board and Spokespeople had been busy planning, in response to the problems that Fred outlines, the creation of a 'recreational league' within the league. Fresh Meat was put on hiatus, skaters that didn't pass their standards had special one-on-one 'mop up sessions' working with an experienced skater on the specific areas they were struggling with until they could pass and join the 'rec league'. Skaters whom had passed their minimum standards were assessed as 'bout ready', or not, at the end of September. Those that were not 'bout ready' could join the rec league; those that were became 'competitive skaters' in the main league. Aladdin made assessment sheets and Sports & Training Committee members filled them in as they watched the 'graduation' bout, ticking off the criteria that each skater

achieved. Wilma came along to watch too, and I chat to her as I fill in my sheet, she says she doesn't like it, everyone 'sitting there and judging new skaters on things that I couldn't even do not so long ago' (field-notes, September 2011).

New Skater Committee stopped taking names to add to the waiting list, and contacted all those already on the list to let them know that Fresh Meat was being indefinitely postponed to make time and space for the re-structuring that was underway:

> It was last year that it happened, and it was when there was talk of bringing in a rec team and I think we'd joined WFTDA by that point and there were lots of changes, so that was kind of strange for me, all of a sudden I had no idea what was going on and all this stuff was being decided and it kind of felt like there wasn't really a place for me, because, at the time if you had the sort of injury that I had, because I'd broken my ankle, you came back to Fresh Meat, but there wasn't going to be a Fresh Meat to come back to and I was like "oh my god this is awful", but, I suppose it was just the whole restructuring thing, but it was very strange, also, to be part of the New Skaters Committee at that time 'cause we had all these people coming to us, going "oh god I've seen roller derby it's so exciting can we join?" and we were like, "nope, don't know when you'll be able to, don't know when that's going to happen, just er, look at the website", so that was, it was always a bit unsatisfying in many respects.
>
> - AY, individual interview, May 2012

So, the league was re-structured. As part of the 'competitive' wing, three new 'home teams' were created, to bout against each other in a yearly home season. The idea was to create more team places so that more skaters could have the experience of bouting, and increase their skill level and competitiveness in an environment where the score mattered less. 'Bout ready', competitive skaters were eligible to be selected on to one of these new teams, often in addition to achieving one of the limited spots on the existing 'A' and 'B' teams, these were the 'competitive skaters'. The 'recreational league' was for everyone else, for those who weren't yet assessed as 'bout ready' and for skaters who didn't want to skate competitively or commit to four practices a week; these skaters became 'non-competitive' or 'recreational' skaters. A new committee was formed to oversee the rec team. The rational for the

‘recreational’ wing was to create a space for playing roller derby for fun without the pressure of competition, of preparing for bouts, and of making attendance. And the idea was to enable the rest of the league, the competitive skaters, to skate at a higher, level, to win more games, without the distraction of catering for ‘non-competitive’ skaters.

The Fresh Meat programme did eventually re-start in November that year, and the New Skaters Committee re-opened the waiting list and the 16-week programme. When skaters completed Fresh Meat, and passed their minimum standards, they now ‘moved up’ to rec team. Those who wanted to ‘be competitive’ had to wait until the quarterly try-outs to be assessed as ‘competitive’, to ‘move up’ to the competitive wing of the league, be placed on one of three home teams, and be potentially eligible for selection on to either the ‘A’ or ‘B’ travel team.

The rec team became known as the ‘wRECking Balls’, and had their first practice at the end of September. The three new home teams started their practices not long after, with an additional separate practice for each team on a rotational basis each Saturday, with the fourth Saturday of each month being designated as a scrimmage practice, each team competing against the others. Lady Garden compared the first home team scrimmage to the second. At the first, she said, no one kept score and all the teams had a group hug at the end, no one cared who won there was just a sense of excitement at this new stage of the league’s development, everyone was just happy to be on a team. By the second practice, according to Lady Garden, the score was kept, there was no group hug, at the end the winning team celebrated and the losers commiserated; ‘that didn’t take long’ Lady Garden remarked, for it to be about who won and who lost (field-notes, October 2011).

The division of the league into competitive and non-competitive wings is about making roller derby ‘more of a sport’. The change initiated in 2011 departed from previous organizational practice where ‘trying to win’ was subject to debate in league-wide meetings, and was, instead, about establishing and instituting competition in the structure of the league:

> I think the main change I can completely attribute to attitude, attitudes of

> the people who are in charge essentially, the attitudes of the people kind of running the league, attitude to the sport and where they think [league] should be, people being a lot more competitive and very much like "well we're not doing anything right if the ['A' team] aren't going to the States to play in WFTDA regionals", or "we're not doing our job if we're not the best team in the country"…
>
> - AY, individual interview, May 2012

Bourdieu reminds us that the '*social definition of sport* is an object of struggles' (1991: 361), and that through processes of commercialization and institutionalization a distinction between professionals and consumers of sport, becomes one of sports' 'most decisive political effects' (ibid: 364). Distinctions between professionals, amateurs and consumers are not (yet) established within the league; no one is paid to play roller derby. While skaters both produce and consume roller derby, roller derby's becoming 'more of a sport' does imply what looks very much like the beginnings of professionalization, a process that can 'encourage players and especially organizers to aim for victory at all costs' (ibid).

The development of the rec league, and divisions of resources between 'competitive' and 'non-competitive' skaters were not, however, exclusively about competition. Avowedly at least, these structural changes were about maintaining 'fairness' whilst working to make roller derby 'more of a sport', about finding a balance between the values of competition and of inclusivity, which came to be articulated as somewhat conflicting in skaters' accounts:

> ST: I was thinking, I was saying to TC, 'cause [league] is expanding so much and we didn't expect it, it could expand even more which is great and then, but it might like, like when we said it might be harder to maintain inclus-, inclus-
>
> SF: inclusivity?
>
> ST: yeah, I mean, you resort to like everyone would be part of [league] but under [league] would be the umbrella and then rec league would run as its own like entity, no one knows how it's going to go, and I think like the ethic is that none of us wants to close the door or anything…
>
> KD: I was just wondering from what you said, and all the expansion

> which is awesome, and the whole [league] as a world contender or getting there, all this kind of thing, and it's just a question, but is it always a positive thing that you're moving towards a professionalization of the sport when everyone started as a kind of hobby thing? It can be quite scary and it can also be quite, become like a job almost because it's so intense and there's so much to do would you have to professionalize and hire people to run it for you and does everyone still want to stay at this level and always train and commit that much?
>
> SF: well there's, that's what the rec league is for isn't it though, so we can have those different levels of commitment to and intensity.
>
> - Sally Tape, SF & Ken Doll, film-making workshop, September 2011

Here the rec league becomes a mechanism for maintaining inclusivity, a place for people who don't want to, or cannot 'train and commit that much'. The specter of a coming 'scary', 'intense' and not always 'positive', professionalization, here brings with it a perhaps inevitable difficulty in maintaining inclusivity, as 'different levels of commitment' proliferate in the league. Lady Garden offers a contrasting interpretation, reflecting that 'the inclusivity is a lie' (field-notes, November 2012). The rec league was created, she says, as a way to bracket off those skaters who couldn't keep up, who couldn't help the league win games and thus be 'more of a sport'.

In reducing the distinction between roller derby and 'sport' another, related distinction is enacted and instituted, and comes to matter more; between competitive skaters, 'people who really, really like sport' and non-competitive skaters, 'women who don't like sport'. In becoming 'a lot more of a sport' the league re-creates and perpetuates a division between like-sport ('competitive') and not-like-sport ('recreational') within itself. These processes, and the accounts skaters give of them, have implications for the league's DIY ethos and structure, for the meaning in practice of 'by the skaters, for the skaters'.

5. 4 By which skaters? And for whom?

In this final section of the chapter I focus on how the institution of competition can be understood as a continuation of distinctions already at play, as hierarchies that previously were implicit are made explicit. I am implicated in such hierarchies and

my position shifts, from being 'there at the beginning' to becoming less involved over time, partly through the process of doing research. The league is still run on a 'by the skaters, for the skaters' ethos, but in becoming 'more structured and 'more of a sport' the 'skaters' in this phrase are redefined and specified; the referent of 'skaters' becomes both narrower and bureaucratically defined. Systems of classification for who belongs and how are increasingly exclusive, as the institution of competition intersects with a DIY organizational ethos.

The step of instituting a distinction between 'competitive' and 'non-competitive' skaters was unprecedented. In many ways though this explicit and organizationally enacted distinction can be understood as a continuation both of policies already in practice and of an existing, but un-formalized implicit hierarchy. The progress of the narrative constructed in this chapter demonstrates how making distinctions between skaters is a process that takes its roots in the very first enactments of team selection and Fresh Meat, that over time became increasingly elaborate, quantified and rule-governed. Informal distinctions too, while perhaps less obvious, were visible when skaters spoke of 'big girl practices', 'newbies', 'new meat', and 'experienced' skaters. An implicit hierarchy constructed according to how long a skater has been involved in the league was a precursor to the more explicit distinctions instituted in the league's incremental restructuring.

Looking to Orville's account of how she joined the league in 2009, she remembers how those skaters 'helping the newbies' could be condescending, 'I got handed over to someone else, and she was really, really, really impatient, and like obviously couldn't be bothered with a newb at all' (individual interview, June 2011). Talking at a Sports & Training meeting in mid-2011 Issi Sullivan half-jokes 'I wish we could just stop Fresh Meat altogether' (field-notes, September 2011). The implication is that those who have been involved in the league for longer are more experienced, more knowing, more skilled and perhaps just 'better', so much so that newer members become naïve and irritating by comparison, a burden to be carried.

My position in the league intersects with these implicit hierarchies, and it shifts at the same time as distinctions between skaters are formalized. As someone who had skated with and been active in organizing the league since its inception I belonged,

as an ‘experienced’ skater. However, as distinctions are increasingly codified in league organization, I am increasingly feeling the effects of injury and the demands of doing research and I stop skating in Spring 2011, and leave the league in Summer 2012. At the same time as competitive/non-competitive classifications are instituted I become a ‘non-skating member’, itself a new classification in membership policy initiated so that injured and retired skaters can retain their membership and continue to volunteer and fill roles in league organization. As a hierarchy is formalized I move to somewhat outside of it, become less participant and more researcher, and I feel increasingly out of touch. My participation in committee meetings is marked by my not being a ‘competitive skater’. I consider these dynamics in more detail, in Interlude #2.

Such a trajectory however, is evident in the language I use throughout the thesis. Writing about the period from 2008-2010 in Chapter 4, my reflex is to use ‘we’ to describe those I am talking about, I belong to and am active within the group I research with. Giving an account of 2011-2012 I become uncomfortable using ‘we’, it no longer accurately describes my position, while still I member of the league, I am no longer a skater, and I begin to use ‘skaters’ to designate the people I am talking about. Still later, ‘now’, writing in 2013, when I am no longer a member of the league and my relation is almost entirely based upon research, ‘participants’ feels more comfortable and is more accurate. The trajectory of my implication comes full circle; as I write about a ‘now’ that is almost already out of date the league is busy organizing a celebration of its fifth anniversary, a gig night and party to be held in May 2013, next week. Skinner has asked me, and I have agreed, to give a ‘speech’ at the party, as someone who was ‘there at the beginning’ and who can tell a story of what it used to be like, and how much the league has changed.

A similar difference in language is visible, and significant, in participants’ accounts of organizational change. It is unremarkable to hear interviewees talk about league organization using an inclusive, first person plural or generalized second person:

> We had a vote about how we should vote…
>
> …our committee structure grew from that…

> …you can control what you're doing…
>
> …we've gone through numerous restructurings…
>
> …you now openly admit you're gonna start playing for rankings…
>
> …we're moving towards being more focused on "this is for the win, we need to play our hearts out"

Whereas this kind of talk is commensurate with a DIY, 'by the skaters, for the skaters' ethos, and articulates the stake that the speaker has in league organization, it is striking and surprising to hear organizational agency increasingly attributed in the third person:

> …*they* were going to start doing the 16 weeks of fresh meat…
>
> …but now what *they've* done is *they've* said "no well you're not bout ready, you haven't done this and you haven't done that…"
>
> …the people who are in charge essentially, the attitudes of the people kind of running the league…

The emergence of a 'they' in participants' talk, who change the duration of Fresh Meat, who decide which skaters can and cannot attend certain practices and who 'run the league' has implications for the meaning of 'by the skaters, for the skaters'. The league remains committed to this ethos, for instance as Tiny Chancer responds to Ken Doll's speculation, 'would you have to professionalize and hire people to run it for you?'

> We have voted specifically against things like having other people come in and running the sport and dictating it to us, like we've kind of said that there's a limit of how much we'll accept from outside of the league. Because you know it's still by the skaters for the skaters and I think it's still quite important to [league] that we try and maintain as much of our own ownership, like the skaters' ownership of the league, as we possibly can while aiming for a higher level as we can but it is for sure going to get harder and harder to maintain that balance.
>
> - Tiny Chancer, film-making workshop, September 2011

The league remains avowedly 'by the skaters, for the skaters'. But when, in November 2011, Tiny Chancer and I go for a pint, our conversation is full of the details of how it is 'going to get harder and harder to maintain that balance'. That evening in the pub Tiny's main concern is with those 'non-competitive' skaters who have positions on the board, or are committee spokespeople: 'they don't represent my interest' she says, as a 'competitive' skater (field-notes, November 2011). Later that year the league institutes a new criterion for those eligible to take up a position on the board and act as committee spokesperson. All 'league management positions' must be filled by a majority of active, competitive skaters. Whether or not a league member is eligible to be involved in this facet of league organization now depends on their classification as a 'competitive skater'.

A 'by the skaters for the skaters' ethos continues to characterize the league, but through instituting competition the meaning of 'skaters' in this formulation is narrowed and specified: who counts as a 'skater', for bureaucratic purposes, has changed. The meaning of 'skater' in 'by the skaters, for the skaters' is now more exclusive, compared to during 2008 and the first months of the league when a 'skater' was anyone who showed up to practice. A related process is observable at the level of WFTDA governance:

> The thing about WFTDA though is that it grew up from a DIY thing, and then they've got to the point now where they do have employees, obviously they're skaters, but you know, it is a paying job now.
>
> - Period Drama, film-making workshop, September 2011

WFTDA, like the league itself, is still technically run on a 'by the skaters, for the skaters' model, it is just that now, *some skaters,* are paid for their organizational work.

In becoming 'a lot more structured, and a lot more of a sport', in organizing competition, shifts occur in what roller derby is, and in who it is for. Putting competition into practice has involved the explicit institution of previously implicit hierarchies between 'experienced' and 'new' skaters. The terms I use to refer to members of the league makes visible my own shifting position relative to these

hierarchies, and a similar process is evident in the way that some skaters talk about league organization, especially with the emergence of a 'they' who are 'in charge'. Since 2009 skaters have collaborated to work out the relative value of inclusivity and competition, and to negotiate the relationship between these two ideals which have come to conflict in practice. Moreover, the change in meaning of 'by the skaters, for the skaters' evidences how there are areas of conflict between the value of competition and a DIY organizational ethos. As the league re-organizes itself according to classifications of 'competitiveness' the distinction between roller derby and 'sport' is minimized, but distinctions between skaters, between who roller derby is and is not 'by' and 'for', proliferate.

Summary & Discussion

Participants' self-conscious organization of league membership became incrementally more rule-governed. Through instituting competition, differences between roller derby and 'sport' were reduced, while differences *between skaters* were encoded and routinized in policy and practice. Beginning with the formalization of a DIY ethos into a committee structure, policies proliferated, and who belonged to the league was delineated. In particular, team selection continued to be an area where the values of *competition* and *inclusivity* came into conflict. Increasingly fine-grained distinctions between skaters were created, and measured. Practices became stratified according to skill level and an unprecedented institutional distinction was established between 'competitive' and 'recreational' wings of the league, and between 'competitive' and 'non-competitive' skaters; informal differences are formalized in institutionally enacted classifications. I am implicated in and benefit from informal hierarchies in the league, which undoubtedly enabled the research. However, as such hierarchies are formalized I became more of a researcher and less of a participant. The league is still characterized by 'by the skaters, for the skaters' organization, yet the 'skaters' in this formulation became a more definitive, and a more exclusive appellation, one that hinged on competitiveness.

What is the relationship between getting taken seriously and the organizational changes described in this chapter? In the league the question of how to *be taken seriously* invokes, but never explicitly raises, a second question; how skaters

themselves should *be serious*. Participants identify seriousness in the rules of roller derby, the dedication they have to playing and organizing their sport, in the injuries so often sustained, and in the competitiveness increasingly put into their daily practice:

> I want it to be taken seriously as a sport, erm, well actually I want it to be a sport, but I, I believe that it is one, I know that it is one, and erm, yeah but I also kind of think well, just because it has another side to it, doesn't, kind of shouldn't really take away from the fact that there's like forty odd pages of rules, and like you know, huge team of referees and NSOs and like you know so, and tactics, and like training and oh my god like so, so much serious stuff involved in it like, that, it almost seems like a ridiculous question, not that I think that your questions are ridiculous [laughing] but [laughing] but you know, it's like I take it as a given that it's a sport even though some people don't…
>
> - Tiny Chancer, individual interview, October 2010

There was a growing consensus among participants, that roller derby simply and self-evidently, and despite ambivalences, is a real, legitimate, athletic, competitive, serious sport. This took place alongside a parallel sense of agreement that many of those not involved continue to think of roller derby as 'just a big sexy joke' (Tiny Chancer, field-notes, July 2011). The distinction is between those who do and do not take roller derby seriously, a dynamic that this chapter has considered in relations *within* the league, and Chapter 6 explores in relations between the league and 'others' not involved.

The question of how to *be* serious, how to *do* roller derby seriously, remains unspoken and is subordinated to concerns with getting taken seriously or achieving serious recognition; participants assume that *we are serious*, the problem is with those who don't recognize this. This tacit assumption leads to both an ambivalent and normative character of the value of competition in the league, the enactment of which emerges as a proxy for seriousness. The institution of competition here plays out in line with established sociological interpretations, of professionalization and struggle for position in a broader field (Bourdieu, 1988, 1991, 1993) and with empirical work with 'alternative' sports (Chapter 2). Seriousness can be used as a synonym for bureaucracy, or rationalization, and in Sartre (1957) and de Beauvoir's

(1948) work, seriousness is understood as the subordination of one's immediate desires to collectively agreed upon, established, regulated, instituted, organized, goals. Seriousness manifests the inevitability of how things are; 'all serious thought is thickened by the world; it coagulates…' so 'sport' or 'competition' take on 'the type of existence of the rock, the consistency, the inertia, the opacity' (Sartre, 1957: 601).

In the well-rehearsed consequences of the institution of competition, seriousness and competition become 'modes of ordering' (Law, 1994). As values they are resources that can be used to prioritize some means and ends over other possible courses of action, and which in their mobilization react back, informing the possibilities and limits of future action. What the league *is*, and what roller derby *is*, changed. There is a sense of inevitability as participants look back over fatal moments (the first home bout, deciding to be competitive, joining the WFTDA…), it seems that ways of organizing *had to* change, become more efficient, fairer:

> 'For the league to keep going and expand… you're bound to have to get more organized'
>
> 'But I don't think it could have necessarily developed any other way… that's just is the way it's going to go I expect and you're going to go through these processes of development or whatever, but, I think it was necessary to move on from that to progress the league.'
>
> 'It'll end up going down this path again…'

As the solidifying consequences of putting competition in to practice reverberated through the league, what skaters made changes them. Roller derby, in the league, appears to become what it was initially defined in opposition to; in organizing competition, in part an exercise in the reduction of ambivalence, roller derby is no longer 'sport for women who don't like sport', and becomes, with a degree of unequivocalism, 'sport for people who really really like sport'. Roller derby's relation to sport changed, not because the definition of 'sport' is expanded, diversified or made more inclusive but because what roller derby *is* changed to be more like sport, which stayed the same. Being-and-becoming real, serious sport becomes an exercise in standardization, of conforming to existing definitions and

expectations, to assimilating with dominant norms and values. What roller derby is seems to come full circle, as skaters' organizational practice begins to shape them. I return to these dynamics in Chapter 7, in an exploration of how, because and despite of such dynamics, participants continued to negotiate *making* their league and roller derby more broadly.

Allusions to 'four legs good, two legs better!' are tempting here, as the once-revolutionary pigs of Orwell's allegory move in to the farmhouse. While the bureaucracy that participants construct in turn informs the possibilities and limits of their action, competition was not a determining structure. Rather, competition has been subject to explicit deliberation and debate, and must be continually enacted in skaters' practice. Skaters made competition happen, and competition has always been there, right from the start, even when it 'didn't matter'.

This chapter, and its precursor Chapter 4, have thus been something of a set-up, much like a simplified and apparently settled shift from difference to similarity in relation to 'sport', when of course it is always a mixture of both. The stories told in these first two substantial chapters have presented roller derby and the league in terms of change, often of a linear development and of an apparent reduction of ambivalence. In the following two chapters I problematize this set up and gather together the empirical material and analysis that troubles such a narrative, and that evidences a proliferation of ambivalences.

In the following chapter, after interlude #2, I return to the question of how and if in seeking serious recognition the league became what it was initially defined in opposition to, focusing on participants' strategies of self-representation and relations between that which is and is not conducive to serious recognition.

INTERLUDE #2 'It's time to fall out of love with your crazy dream and just write a thesis…'

In the first interlude I described how the research methodology was initially grounded in and dependent on my own involvement in the league, which inspired the aim of producing research that was ambivalent about itself. I discuss below how I stopped skating, and eventually left the league, as patient supervisors suggested that it was 'time to fall out of love' with my 'crazy dream', and to 'just write a thesis'. Becoming 'just a researcher' coincided with the changes in the league described in Chapters 4 and 5, of roller derby becoming 'just like any other normal sport'. Ambivalent movement between participant/researcher became stasis, and this interstice is about feelings of inertia that accompanied this phase.

Shifting towards being 'just a researcher' is bound up with questions of seriousness. Of all the interstices, this one contains the most personal narrative, and seeks to explore connections between emotional turbulence and doing 'serious' PhD research. Sociologies of feeling, affect and emotion mean that the problem can be stated in an orthodox manner; might my private PhD troubles have broader sociological relevance as public (or methodological) issues (Wright Mills, 2000)? What is the emotional labour of 'insider' research (Hochschild, 1979)? Two personal accounts of mental health and academia have been particularly useful here. Church (1996) documents intersections between depression and the contradictions and conditions of academic work. More significantly, Cvetkovich (2012) makes a case for the political and public character of depression and anxiety. Both authors argue for the legitimacy of feeling and affect in academic work and for personal narrative as research method. Such bodies of literature could, perhaps disingenuously, be paraphrased as arguing for the seriousness of emotions and affect. Conversely, in broader epistemological debates (Beck, 1967; Flyvbjerg, 2001) the 'serious' colour of social research is oftentimes tied to a mast of 'science' or 'objectivity'; research is 'serious' because it is rational, not emotional. I'm interested in whether emotional turbulence can be a resource for thinking about research methodology more broadly, and how ambivalence and alienation in research practice are written out of research products. What follows thus documents and works through 'places where ordinary feeling and

abstract thinking don't line up' (Cvetkovich, 2012: 82), in an attempt to explore the relations between research, feeling and seriousness.

I stopped skating in April 2011. I had been repeatedly injuring my knees for the past two years. Recurrent impact, 'trauma' said the physiotherapist, caused lasting damage to the meniscal disc, a cartilage-like cushion between the femur (thigh bone) and tibia and fibula (calf bones). After every bout my knees would be severely swollen, impossible to bend and flex, and painful to bear weight on. I saw physiotherapists, did acupuncture and an osteopath gave me a tennis ball to rub into my arse-cheek. I had a raft of daily exercises to realign and strengthen the muscles around my knees, hips and lower back. I often kept skating and going to practice despite ubiquitous recommendations to rest.

Late summer in 2009, just before starting my MSc, I slipped and fell on the wet floor in the bakery I was working in. I landed in a kneeling position, which had been impossible to force my sore and swollen knees into since a bout a few weeks previously. The pain was excruciating, and I took extra-strength codeine for a month afterwards. In the Autumn of 2010, just as I began to interview and make field-notes, I went over the handlebars of my bike, landing on both knees on the tarmac. I was rostered to bout less than a week later. I went to practice and forced myself to fall on my knees over and over again to get used to re-opening the scabs.

It got harder and harder to maintain daily physiotherapy exercises. 'Easy' as it was, I did it less and less. Getting down on the floor three times a day to perform repetitive, boring, small controlled movements felt like a daily reminder of the inadequacies of my body, which stood in for the growing inadequacy of my 'insider' methodology. The pattern continued without improvement until the spring of 2011, when I took six weeks off from training in an attempt at full recovery. At my first night back at practice I tried a controlled fall while warming up. Fresh pain jolted through my knees. I cried and got the bus home immediately, deciding on the way that it was time to quit playing roller derby. I was sad to stop skating, and the sense of failure or inadequacy was compounded by methodological implications and the realization that research based in playing roller derby was no longer something that I could do.

The methodology, designed and grounded in my participation, could not continue as I had planned. I had based the validity of the research in my belonging, but after stopping skating, and especially after leaving the league a year later in April 2012, I increasingly felt that I was loosing the ability to legitimately talk and write about roller derby and the league. In the year after I stopped skating, but continued my organizational involvement in the league, I planned to transcribe interviews, continue participant observation, complete the film-making project, code data and write first drafts. I did very little of any of these things. The film-making project stalled half-way through, the drafts that I did write were sprawling, indulgent and unfinished. I did not complete interview transcription until January 2013, over two years after I began interviewing.

Moreover, this period was characterized by exhaustion and stress; chronic illnesses, suicide attempts, broken bones, severe depression, and intimate violence among my closest friends and in my extended family led me to take on caring responsibilities and supportive roles alongside being over-worked and under-paid in various teaching jobs. Everyone has versions of this list, what does any of it have to do with doing research? To even make the link feels mercenary, but these are the conditions in which the research took place. Some of those friends with broken bones, severe mental health problems and violent partners were also people who participated in my research. The problem is the assumption that feeling is insufficiently political; that 'feeling has to become something else to make it count as political' (Cvetkovich, 2012: 200). Another way of saying this is that, despite decades of feminist and queer work on feeling and affect (Hochschild, 1979; Sedgwick, 2003), emotion is insufficiently serious to play a central role in public realms of politics and research.

During this period I transcribe precisely none of my interviews. I feel physically unable to make myself sit down and do it. I make plans to transcribe for one hour every morning. I don't. Or to spend a whole month doing it until it is done. I don't. I manage the odd five minutes before spending the rest of the day staring into space, and I do this over and over again for months on end. I've told interviewees, friends, that I'll send them their transcripts 'six to eight weeks' after their interview. In some cases it takes me 18 months. Transcription – not doing it – was where I got stuck, a

primary location of inertia and impasse. Not transcribing for so long was where I somehow refused to own up to the responsibility of doing research.

I dismissed all the obvious solutions to the 'problem' (voice recognition software, paying someone to transcribe) out of hand. Transcription was simultaneously something *I had to do* and something I didn't, couldn't or wouldn't make happen. Transcription was, more than interviewing, film-making and taking field-notes, undeniably a *research activity*. While 'data generation' didn't feel particularly far removed from 'what I might have done anyway', transcription was utterly alien. The act of listening, over and over to the recordings, and typing out, pinning down utterances, seemed to be the alchemy of research; it was the point at which leisure undeniably became work. It was where I could not get away from how doing research was an exercise in translating something I loved into the terms and parameters of sociological knowledge production. I didn't want to alienate myself, or the research, from the daily actuality of the league. I responded to this problem by ignoring it, by not transcribing for as long as possible.

None of this is a property of transcription in itself. Transcription was just were all the discomfort and anxiety about doing research manifested itself. It was as if by putting off transcription I could delay the inevitable, or pretend that I wasn't actually doing research, and magically prolong a state of researcher/participant in the face of my increasing distance from the heart of the league. I didn't want to own up to my decreasing insiderness or its implications. I took a cowardly option; instead of taking responsibility for the growing centrality of research in my relation to the league and exploring productive ways to inhabit this new position, I simply ignored it. As if not-doing was a way to avoid the consequences, and inevitable compromises, involved in doing *anything*.

Cvetkovich's suggestion that 'writing personal narrative encourages the hunches, intuitions, and feelings that intellectual analysis can restrict' (2012: 80-81) is useful here. Emotion is central to 'becoming open to what we don't know' and to 'that which exceeds our current thinking' (ibid: 200). Significantly Cvetkovich emphasizes the 'willingness to encounter impasse or lack of knowledge', that can

come with emotional expression; 'depression or being stuck can be an invitation to that which we don't yet know …scholarship as creative practice – involves not knowing… in order to see what happens' (ibid: 202). I didn't know how to attempt research that didn't alienate itself from the league, and I was too scared to try and find out.

The tension and pain of injury, ceasing to be a participant and the dominance with which research came to characterize my relation to the league were manifest in an all-consuming inertia surrounding transcription. These feelings were at one and the same time intimately bound up with doing research, and bracketed off as not relevant. The blockage arose in this separation. I include these narratives of feeling, and moreover, of uncertainty here in the interludes as a way to see what happens when both the 'private troubles' of doing research and the 'not-knowing' are included, albeit on the margins, rather than being purged in pursuit of the production of an unambiguously 'serious' piece of research.

The next interstice, which comes after Chapter 6, is about finding a way through the inertia described above. Not-knowing led to the possibility of allegory as method, to considering convergences between getting taken seriously in roller derby and in sociological knowledge production, and to the possibility of re-thinking research methods as techniques of seriousness.

6. Non-/seriousness: 'Athletic Fags' & Avocado Radio

Insofar as value is social, it is always a comparison; value can only be realized in other people's eyes. Another way to put this is that there must always be an audience. It is not just a question of being recognized as just, honorable, or a better provider than someone else, but also, whose assessment one takes seriously (and of course, by the same token, whose views it never even occurs to one to think about at all).

Graeber, 2013: 226

In February 2011, after a year of lobbying, the UKRDA was admitted as a member of the British Roller Sports Federation (BRSF), which 'officially *recognized* roller derby as a UK sport' (UKRDA, 2011: n/p, emphasis added). When the UKRDA announced this news online, one participant remarked 'now no one from any other sport can say roller derby isn't a real sport' (CeeCee, field-notes, February 2011). While there was an emergent consensus among participants that roller derby is simply and self-evidently a real, serious, sport, preoccupations with *getting taken seriously* continued. Such a situation implies an 'us', who take roller derby seriously, and a 'them' who participants perceive as dismissing roller derby as 'just a big sexy joke'. Getting taken seriously hinges on recognition, as participants anticipate and reflect upon how roller derby, and they themselves are perceived by both specific and generalized others (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1967). Getting taken seriously is a question of roller derby's becoming unequivocally intelligible as 'sport'.

Thus far, getting taken seriously appears to be a question of minimizing differences between roller derby and other forms of 'real, legitimate sport' while establishing distinctions between 'then' and 'now', and between skaters. Not taking roller derby seriously becomes something that participants used to do, or that is attributed to those not involved or on the margins of the group. In Weberian terms, 'status groups' engage in both internal struggles over their own local and particular notions of status/value/esteem, and a larger, external struggle that takes place more broadly (Weber, 1978). From a Bourdieusian perspective, this is the beginning of a 'shift whereby sport as an elite practice reserved for amateurs became sport as a spectacle

produced by professionals for consumption by the masses' (1991: 364). Participants respond, in practice, to the question of how to produce representations of roller derby that are legible as 'sport' and conducive to serious recognition. The explicitness of participants' concerns with *getting taken seriously* evokes a further, much more implicit question of how to *be serious*, which in the pursuit of serious recognition remains relatively unspoken.

There are three precedents for conceptualizing seriousness that I return to throughout this chapter as tools to think with. Firstly, seriousness can be used as a synonym for rational, bureaucratic organization, for legal-rational authority (Weber, 1958). Simone de Beauvoir has this to say about 'the serious man':

> He makes himself serious. He dissimulates his subjectivity under the shield of rights which emanate from the ethical universe recognized by him; he is no longer a man, but a father, a boss, a member of the Christian Church or the Communist Party. (1948: 48)

For Sartre 'the serious attitude involves starting from the world and attributing more reality to the world than to oneself' (1957: 601). From this perspective, getting taken seriously means changing roller derby to make it commensurate with 'sport', which remains unaltered. For de Beauvoir 'the serious man' is in denial of his own freedom (1948: 47). When 'the spirit of seriousness… puts forward the opacity of the desired object and posits it in itself as a desirable irreducible' (Sartre, 1957: 646), serious recognition becomes an object, in the pursuit of which 'serious' skaters make themselves 'slave(s) of that end' (de Beauvoir, 1948: 48). Here seriousness is about structure/agency, and relations between means and ends.

Secondly, and relatedly, in *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin conceptualizes seriousness as 'a spokesman of power' (1984: 94), 'a tendency toward the stability and completion of being, toward one single meaning' (ibid: 101). Seriousness is bound to 'official culture' (ibid) and 'official spheres of ideology' (ibid: 73). In seeking serious recognition, from this perspective, the meaning of roller derby becomes stable, complete and singular; 'it's just a sport, what more can we say?' (The Beefcake, field-notes, November 2011). Bakhtin posits the 'opposite' of 'official seriousness', (1984: 75) as 'carnival' or 'folk laughter', a 'gay parody of

official reason, of the narrow seriousness of official "truth"' (ibid: 39). Carnival laughter is interpreted as working to:

> …consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things.' (1984: 34)

Here seriousness is about hegemony and dominant ideology, and a dazzling, utopic potential for renewal and radical change is attributed to seriousness' 'opposite'.

Thirdly, looking to recent debates in anthropological theory, the question of who and what to take seriously is a question of how 'to divide the human race into, on the one hand, people whose beliefs one can legitimately challenge, and, on the other hand, everyone else' (Viveiros de Castro, 2011: 136). Candea elaborates upon how when something is *not* taken seriously it is 'subject to explication' and 'verification'; it is something to 'agree or disagree with' and 'adopt as our own, or reject as fantasies' (2011: 148). Conversely, to take seriously is 'a self-imposed suspension of the desire to explicate the other, to verify the other's possible world' (ibid: 147). To take seriously is to refrain 'from either assent or critique, in order to allow the people themselves to specify the conditions under which what they say is to be taken' (ibid). From this perspective, getting taken seriously is the pursuit of roller derby's being 'left in a state of sustained possibility' (ibid: 148). Here taking seriously is a question of relativism, politics and ethics.

Getting taken seriously in the league can be expressed in over-simplified dualisms according to *what the league used to be like* and *what it became*; it is easy to see how questions of serious recognition align with the account presented so far (table 6.1). Such dichotomous contrasts, considered alongside precedents for theorizing seriousness, are broadly commensurate with what we might expect, given well-worn analyses of 'mainstreaming' in a variety of sports contexts and of struggles for position in a broader field of power (see Chapter 2). Seeking 'inclusion' in 'mainstream sporting arenas' is often interpreted as complicating, if not entirely

precluding challenges to dominant definitions of 'sport' (Price & Parker, 2003: 109). Given such precedents we might expect that, in pursuit of serious recognition, the league inevitably becomes what it was initially defined in opposition to, 'sport for people who really, really like sport'.

'Then'	**'Now'**
Participants claim significant difference from 'sport'.	Participants claim similarity to 'sport'.
Gendered; roller derby is (ambivalently) for women.	Less gendered; roller derby is (ambivalently) for people.
Practices interpreted as occasions for subversion of emphasized femininity are integral to what roller derby *is*.	Practices interpreted as occasions for subversion of emphasized femininity disavowed.
Organizationally 'shambolic'.	Organizationally 'structured'; bureaucracy develops.
'Competitiveness' the subject of debate.	'Competitiveness' instituted as an organizing principle.
Distinctions between skaters are informal.	Distinctions between skaters are formalized.
'We' did not take roller derby seriously.	**Most of 'us' take roller derby seriously.**
Relatively unconcerned with recognition; posters, logos & uniforms are not necessarily intelligible as 'sport'.	**Claims are made for recognition; posters & logos redesigned, practices of dress shift.**

TABLE 6.1 'THEN' & 'NOW' V1

On one level, the league does at first appear to be following the same, well-worn path. To stick with our simplified dichotomies just a little longer, when participants 'do not take roller derby seriously' they wear fishnet tights and sparkly hot-pants; emphasis is on 'fun' and 'skating around for twenty minutes then gossiping with each other' (Fred, joint interview with Wilma, June 2011); anyone can just turn up and join in; organization is 'shambolic'; and league posters feature skaters dressed up as Harry Potter, MC Hammer and Elvis. When participants 'do take roller derby seriously' teams play to win, and for rankings; organization is bureaucratic; attendance is tracked and codified; membership is tied to routine measurement of skill; posters are more 'professional' and are designed to convey roller derby as a 'sport'; and skaters wear 'athletic' branded sportswear and mesh vests.

Table 6.1 is a set-up of course. My contention is that an analysis of getting taken seriously, and especially of *non-/seriousness*, provides much more than another set of binary neologisms for understanding, for example, the early stages of professionalization. A focus on *how* participants make claims for serious recognition disrupts the precedents set in existing literature and the dichotomous linearity upon which much of it rests. In Breeze (2013b) I conceptualize seriousness as a mode of ordering (Law, 1994), arguing that getting taken seriously has multiple, ambivalent not necessarily coherent effects. In what follows I elaborate upon this argument, with a precise focus on self-representation. The chapter is concerned with the more *surprising* responses, in participants' practice, to questions of serious recognition. I use laughably simplified tables and diagrams as devices through which ambivalence and nuance is foreground.

In what follows I return to empirical material discussed previously, and integrate new material to argue that distinctions between what is, and is not, conducive to serious recognition dissolve and become nebulous in participants' representational practice, just as a set of related distinctions, between who can, and can not, legitimately say what roller derby is, are established and maintained. Getting taken seriously, while about recognition, turns on the creation of identities, meanings and relationships that are deliberately un-recognizable, that are almost impossible to take seriously. Rather than the league becoming what was once opposed, skaters make

claims for recognition and inclusion while simultaneously refuting and somewhat undoing the terms of such recognition. My analysis thus responds particularly to questions of; how is getting taken seriously negotiated in practice? Does the league become what it was initially defined in opposition to? And how do participants make distinctions between what is, and is not, conducive to serious recognition?

The chapter firstly, discusses how new 'serious' identities, meanings and practices are facilitated, perversely, by participants not taking themselves, or roller derby, entirely seriously. Secondly, I present an extended discussion of participants' strategies in relation to seriousness that do not hinge on roller derby's recognizability as sport. These include inversions and transpositions, through which participants draw attention to the profoundly gendered character of 'serious sport' and occasionally refuse intelligibility. Throughout I develop *non-/seriousness* as a term for what happens when participants make claims for serious recognition simultaneous with refusing the terms of such legibility.

6.1 Recognition I: New Identifications

A relation of critical difference to 'sport', often located in roller derby's women-led character, was increasingly reinterpreted by participants as something that 'detracts from the sport':

> Ken Doll: I do always think that's kind of interesting, whenever you're talking about roller derby it always goes straight to the feminism issues, [mmm] which is, it can make sense because of all the things that we're talking about, but at the same time the fact that that happens immediately also detracts from the sport [BP: it's not just about feminism] [SF: yeah, yeah] …it's also about people that just really, really like proper sport and skating and working hard and training and that whole camaraderie thing, so if I were to make a roller derby movie, I would have something that focused on, just girls being on a sports team…
>
> - Film-making workshop, September 2011

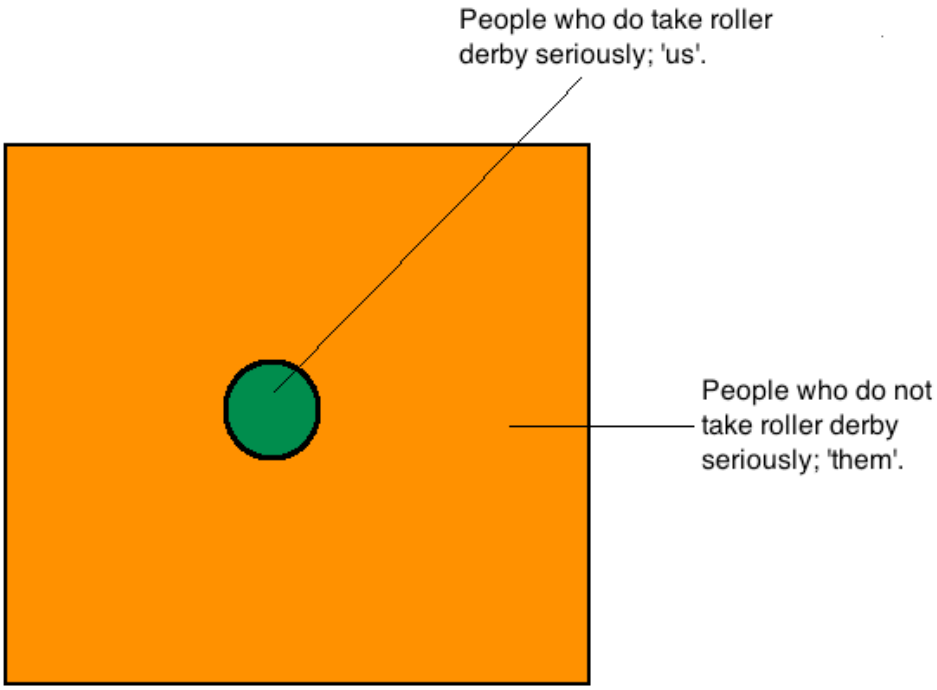
Making roller derby make sense as 'just girls being on a sports team' arises in conversation with interlocutors who do not understand what roller derby is, or necessarily view it as a sport:

> SF: That's almost the hardest thing to explain to people who don't understand derby, like they're looking for rankings, they're looking for sort of like, the narrative of a sport and we're just like "uh uh we just play and it's cool", it's really hard to convey this is just people figuring things out [laughs]
>
> Ken Doll: But that's the difficulty I think probably because it's not a standard sport like that, it's therefore really hard for people to see it as a sport…
>
> - Film-making workshop, September 2011

Participants bemoan how when local newspapers do run articles on the league they are confined to the 'lifestyle' or 'women's' sections, rather than the 'sports' pages (film-making workshop, September 2011). In the second half of 2011, as the inaugural World Cup drew increased media attention to roller derby in general, including 'serious' features in broadsheet newspapers (Lee, 2011; Sassoon Coby 2011), one Australian article caused particular furor by proclaiming in its headline: 'Roller derby isn't a sport' (Taylor A, 2011 n/p):

> In the end I think that there is one guiding principle to clinch the argument. If it involves wearing fishnet stockings then, however sporty the players might appear, they are not taking part in a sport (Taylor A, 2011: n/p)

For this journalist, the combination of supposedly incompatible signifiers of emphasized femininity with 'sport', precisely what previous research interprets as occasions for gender subversion/conformity (see Chapter 2), prevents roller derby's recognition as a sport. While A Taylor (ibid) is an explicit example of roller derby actually not being taken seriously, participants also reflexively anticipate others' interpretations *in potentia* to design and orientate their representation practice. The fishnets, that were once 'a "fuck you" to the sporting world and any kind of authority that would say, "you're not a sport"' (Orville, individual interview, June 2011) give way to desires for recognition, to 'see it shown on TV or in the newspapers looking like a sport' (The Beefcake, individual interview, October 2010). This is achieved in interaction with 'authorities', the BRSF and journalists.



6.1 'US' AND 'THEM' V1

To disingenuously simplify these dynamics, pictorially we might imagine something like figure 6.1, where 'us' is everyone inside roller derby and 'they' represents an unspecified collection of those outside. *Getting taken seriously* increasingly informed much of skaters' individual self-representational practice during this period too. As Tiny Chancer is getting ready, on the morning of a bout in the summer of 2011, she comes into my room to tell me how she really wants to wear a new pair of fishnet tights, that are 'calling to her', but that she's feeling a 'pressure' to dress more like a 'serious athlete'. In the end she decides against the fishnets, but I lend her a pair of glittery knee-high socks (field-notes, August 2011). Getting taken seriously is a question of turning the whole field of figure 6.1 green.

In this context it is hardly surprising that the confusion and ambivalence, rife during the league's beginnings, over how we should identify ourselves (the 'rollergirls', 'rollerladies' and 'rollerbitches' of Chapter 4) grew into an apparently clearer distinction between 'rollergirls' and 'athletes'. In the context of women's sport more broadly participants identifying themselves as 'rollergirls' *and* as 'athletes' can both

be interpreted as disrupting sport and gender through denaturalizing any assumed consanguinity between 'sport', masculinity and male bodies. Rollergirl does so via a reconfiguration what gets to count as 'sport'. 'Athlete' does so via a demonstration that women can do sport too. It seems that rather than getting taken seriously bringing with it the imperative to abandon any engagement with gender subversion/conformity, there is a shift in the kind of engagements that take place, from scrambling the ideological incompatibility of 'femininity' and 'sport' to a claim for the legitimacy of women's full contact sport.

'Rollergirl', as a self-identification, is increasingly relegated to the past, or denounced as how only some, inexperienced skaters, refer to themselves:

> I mean obviously there's the [laughs] quite annoying rollergirl fan-girl type, that's like one sort of group of people that join because they want to be a rollergirl, because they think it's really cool, and it's more to do with wearing a head-to-toe outfit and going out drinking wearing that, and being part of a gang and like belonging to something, it's more about that than about skating competitively, and getting any better, and that's fine if that's what they want to do, I didn't, I don't have that motivation and I don't really get it… and then there's the other extreme would be like actual sporty competitive types.
>
> - Orville, individual interview, June 2011

> A: I think there are like, people who want to play the sport and then you get people who maybe don't quite understand how much work it is, like you get people maybe who just want to be "rollergirls" who are really annoying
>
> ST: Yeah I think like did PB not say something about that the other day, like, some girl at the beginning would just come to the photo-shoot but didn't come to any practices, I think that might have been like that kind of person… I think when you first start you do that, like I found these old photos of me like "being a rollergirl" and I suppose it's just 'cause it's fun at the start, and it's like "woah I'm a rollergirl" I suppose it's just like the excitement gets carried away at the beginning.
>
> - Aladdin & Sally Tape, paired interview, June 2011

> The worst scenario is when you come across skaters who want to be given a place on the team to bout and "be a rollergirl" but don't want to go through the intensive training and reach the standard to bout […] They also tend to be the people who want [the league] to give something to them but they don't necessarily want to give something to [the league] to keep it going for the future.
>
> - The Beefcake, via email, August 2012

Over time, (competitive) skaters become 'athletes':

> I consider our 'A' Team to be pretty much athletes, you know they're as fit as any other top sportswomen, they're strong, they know what they're doing, there's tactics involved, once you really get into it it's a very complex game.
>
> - AY, individual interview, May 2011

> It sort of gradually creeps up on you, maybe all of a sudden you realize "actually I take this really seriously, I am being really athletic in doing this."
>
> - Owlison, individual interview, June 2011

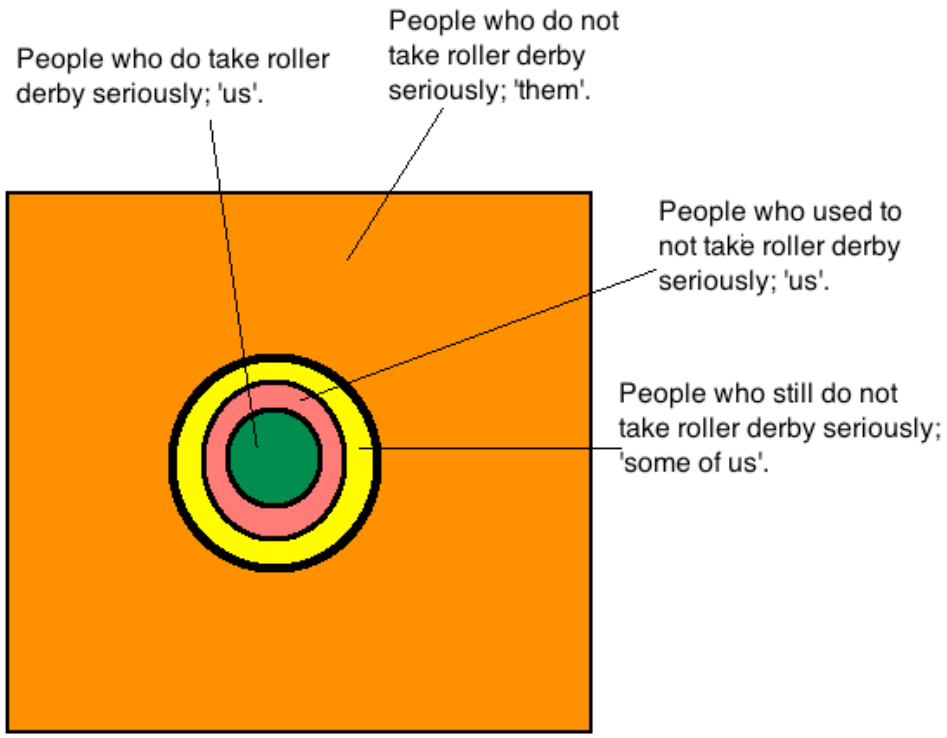
> So you're actually forcing people to become more and more sportswoman-like, you know more sporty, more athletic, and all this kind of stuff, whereas originally it was all about "yeah it's the sport for women who don't like sport", but its not now.
>
> - Fred, paired interview with Wilma, June 2011

Commensurate with what we might expect, we can add 'rollergirls' and 'athletes' to table 6.2; 'athletes' take themselves seriously and are recognizably sporting but 'rollergirls' do not and are not. Perhaps we need to alter our diagram to include distinctions both between 'then' and 'now' and 'us' and 'them', where 'us' is fractured temporally as well as according to organizationally enacted distinctions

between skaters (figure 6.2). Getting taken seriously however is still a question of turning the whole field green.

'Then'	**'Now'**
'We' did not take roller derby seriously.	Most of 'us' take roller derby seriously.
Relatively unconcerned with recognition; posters, logos & uniforms are not necessarily intelligible as 'sport'.	Claims are made for recognition; posters & logos are redesigned, practices of dress shift.
'Rollergirls' do not necessarily take selves seriously, not straightforwardly intelligible as 'sport'.	**'Athletes', take themselves seriously, recognizable as 'sport'**

TABLE 6.2 'THEN' & 'NOW' V2



6.2 'US' AND 'THEM' V2

It is clear that getting taken seriously is a reflexive exercise in which participants imagine how others might perceive them and adjust their self-representations accordingly. Tiny Chancer identifies herself as an 'athlete' to challenge interlocutors who are 'ridiculing' roller derby, who are not taking it seriously:

> I feel like a bit of a wanker saying that "I'm an athlete" but I also prefer to say that I was a ath- like sometimes, it depends on the context, it really depends on the context, if I'm in a situation where I think that like saying "I'm a rollergirl" might be understood in a way that doesn't get across the fact that I work very hard to play a sport that I take seriously, then I'll say "I'm an athlete", otherwise its just easier to say "I'm a rollergirl" because that's what we're called… it's quite a hard one actually and it totally changes to suit who I'm speaking to, you know if somebody's kind of ridiculing it I'll be like "fuck you I'm an athlete!" [laughs]
>
> - Tiny Chancer, individual interview, October 2010

Tiny Chancer takes roller derby seriously, even as a 'rollergirl', it is only in encountering and challenging the beliefs of a 'they' that she identifies as an athlete; making herself intelligible, in the terms of 'sport'. Just as with Sartre's waiter, who plays '*at being* a waiter in a café' (1959: 82 emphasis original), Tiny Chancer 'plays with (her) condition in order to realize it' (ibid). Thinking about 'athlete' with Sartre's definition of 'seriousness' means that Tiny Chancer's use of the term begins to appear as 'a "representation" for others and for (her)self' (ibid 83), 'by making the *typical gestures*' of sport (ibid, emphasis original):

Such an interpretation does not take full account of what I want to suggest is the most significant part of this extract; how Tiny Chancer reportedly *feels like a bit of a wanker* when she identifies herself as an 'athlete'. Participants laugh at themselves when they self-identify as 'rollergirls' *and* as 'athletes', and express discomfort with both; distinctions between 'rollergirls' and 'athletes' have at times been far from absolute or wholly impermeable:

> Yeah it is a weird one, it's funny because, when people say "I'm a rollergirl", I always say it with a bit of a laugh because you know, I'm a bit old to be a girl, and so when I talk to people, probably about roller derby, I say, "I play roller derby", I don't think I've ever said, "I'm a rollergirl" so, maybe that's kind of, subconsciously me not accepting it as

> explaining what I am, but I don't think I'd go so far as to say I wanna be called a "roller derby athlete"…
>
> - The Beefcake, individual interview, October 2010

> I, you know, I wouldn't classify myself as an athlete at all, I don't *really* mind "rollergirl", I think, err, "athlete" I find a bit funny.
>
> - Kathy Hacker, individual interview, October 2010

> MB: do you think that you're an athlete?
>
> PB: [laughs] err yeah, well, I think its funny to say that, but however you define it I think I'm more of a sportswoman I think athlete sounds a but like, I dunno, funny.
>
> - Pauline Baynes, individual interview, October 2010

In these examples skaters laugh at, and are ambivalent about identifying themselves as 'rollergirls' (not conducive to serious recognition) and as 'athletes' (conducive to serious recognition). Just as Tiny Chancer feels 'like a bit of a wanker' as an 'athlete', The Beefcake says 'rollergirl' 'with a bit of a laugh'.

Despite the distinctions that can be drawn between them, what 'rollergirls' and 'athletes' have in common is that they are both new forms of self-identification. Ambivalent and uncomfortable laughter at both these forms of identification is tied to their novelty as appellations that are bound up in different ways with serious recognition. Laughing at oneself as a rollergirl and/or athlete helps make such new identifications, and the forms of engagement with a broader, gendered, field of sport they represent, possible. These new identifications and ways of self-representing are enabled by skaters not taking themselves entirely seriously.

Laughing whilst saying 'I am a rollergirl' (and occupying a position of gendered unintelligibility in relation to 'sport'), and laughing whilst saying 'I am an athlete' (and making a claim for inclusion in the world of sport), means that both identifications can, if needs be, be dismissed as a joke; renounced as has come to

happen with ‘rollergirls’. Bakhtin describes a fifteenth century apology in the wake of carnival feasting that ‘stresses that the feast has not a serious but a purely jesting character’ (1984: 75). Transgressions made in jest have a safety net, they can be dismissed; we were only joking, we didn’t mean it, it isn’t real, we weren’t being serious. In carnival feasting, ‘the world was permitted to emerge from the official routine but exclusively under the camouflage of laughter’ and ‘barriers were raised, provided there was nothing but laughter.’ (ibid: 90). The laughter surrounding ‘rollergirl’ and ‘athlete’ makes both transgressions safer than they would be if said with a straight-face, more possible than they would be if said seriously. A similar dynamic is observable with derby names:

> You know it’s a serious sport, where [skaters] are actually taking the sport seriously, although they may have elements to it where they don’t take themselves too seriously… there’s maybe something about doing it for a protection thing, kind of, to take away from the fact that they’re training really hard, “lets come up with some fun names ‘cause that will make it like we don’t take ourselves too seriously” that might originally come from, the kind of “lets make it a little bit fun and a little bit quirky kind of thing, and give ourselves the protective shield of, it’s a sport but you don’t have to take us that seriously if we’re not that good…”
>
> - BS, individual interview, June 2011

The laughing ambivalence that participants express in ‘rollergirls’ and ‘athletes’ means that both self-identifications can be disavowed as claims that were never *really meant*, that were only ever intended as *jokes*; neither position is initially taken seriously by participants themselves. Not taking oneself seriously enables both the *initial use* of novel designations and their *potential disavowal*. Not taking oneself seriously introduces a distance between what is said and what is meant, that can function as a safety net.

This analysis echoes Grindstaff & West’s discussion of performance frames in cheerleading, which similar to roller derby increasingly emphasizes competition and athleticism, in ‘efforts to be recognized as a legitimate “sport”’ (2010: 144). Constructions of cheerleading as ‘just a performance’ act as a ‘buffer protecting cheerleaders from the stigma of femininity associated with the emotional

performance of spirit' (ibid: 146). Cheerleaders thus 'distance themselves' (ibid: 143) from the emotional script of cheerleading, via a 'performance frame [that] functions simultaneously to feminize cheerleading and to provide an alibi for accepting that feminization' (ibid: 146). Equally, Throsby has analyzed the construction of 'heroic fatness' in open-water marathon swimming, where body fat is a performance advantage in a broader context where 'the fat body and the sporting body are conventionally understood as mutually exclusive' (2013a: 1). Throsby analyzes how 'the construction of purposeful fatness as courageously self-sacrificial obscures the necessary 'not-me-ness' of the fat that immunizes the heroically fat swimmer against the negative stigma of 'real' fatness' (ibid: 4). 'Heroic' fat is thus 'rendered safely inauthentic' (ibid), as 'the ventriloquized 'fake' belly of the heroically fat swimmer is *forgivable* fun' (ibid: 12, emphasis added) in comparison to the unforgivable and consequence-laden fatness in obesity reduction rhetoric and policy.

'Then'	**'Now'**
'We' did not take roller derby seriously.	Most of 'us' take roller derby seriously.
Relatively unconcerned with recognition e.g. posters, logos & uniforms are not necessarily intelligible as 'sport'.	Claims are made for recognition e.g. posters & logos are redesigned, practices of dress shift.
'Rollergirls' do not necessarily take selves seriously, not straightforwardly intelligible as 'sport'.	'Athletes', take themselves seriously, intelligible as 'sport'
Not taking oneself seriously facilitates new identifications and self-representations to be safely played with and abandoned if necessary. Not taking oneself seriously enables 'serious' self-representations.	

TABLE 6.3 'THEN' & 'NOW' V3

Laughing ambivalence as to who is and is not a 'rollergirl' or an 'athlete', who does and does not take roller derby seriously, blurs boundaries and keeps them open, for a while, as participants refuse to take themselves entirely seriously. Such refusal acts, similar to the alibis, buffers, immunization and ventriloquism discussed above, to enable participants' to both try on, and distance themselves from their new identifications; to both affirm, and deny, their commitment to being a rollergirl/being an athlete. Perhaps we need to modify our table to reflect the porous character of these boundaries in such moments (table 6.3). Participants' not necessarily taking themselves seriously enables new forms of self-identification and shifts in what roller derby is. Not taking oneself seriously can facilitate change, providing a safety net and enabling future disavowal, *both* of for instance of having once taken photos of yourself 'being a rollergirl' *and* now experimenting with calling yourself an athlete. While this distancing humour, not taking oneself seriously, is an enabling resource for negotiating ambivalent boundaries, and keeping them open for a while, in these same interactions 'rollergirl' is, albeit ambivalently, denigrated. Boundaries are rearticulated as participants traverse them.

In the following section I further explore the possibility that not taking oneself seriously could be a strategy, precondition even, for seeking serious recognition. I turn to further instances of 'athlete' and 'athletic' in participants' talk where the relation between not taking oneself seriously and serious recognition is increasingly complicated.

6.2 Recognition II: Inversions, Transpositions & Refusals

Interviewing The Beefcake in 2010 we sat in my kitchen drinking tea and eating ginger biscuits. There was a lot to talk about, and after about an hour and a half I wonder if it was getting tiring or tedious for her:

> MB: ok, if you, at any point are just like "I don't want to have to answer any more questions about roller derby"…
>
> TB: I might have a fag break in a minute if that's alright…
>
> MB: Totally fine! …um ok so do you wanna have a fag break now?

TB: Yeah shall we, an athletes' fag break [laughs]

- The Beefcake, individual interview October 2010

We head through to my bedroom and smoke our 'athletes' fags' out the window. During 2008 and 2009 it was common for skaters to gather outside sports centers, smoking in small groups, before and after practice. At half time during bouts The Beefcake and others would dash through the fire exits to get outside, skates still on, to grab a quick smoke before the second half. That The Beefcake once shared a joint with a skater from the opposing team at half time later became the subject of laughter, but at the time of this interview the suggestion of an 'athletes' fag break' was nothing particularly out of the ordinary.

'Athletic snacks', is another instance of the same formula. Pauline Baynes and I often texted each other to joke about the 'athletic snacks' we ate which included chocolate raisins, Snickers, whole packets of fish fingers, endless biscuits, really whatever sugary, processed food we happened to be eating. Lady Garden, Aladdin, Felicity, CeeCee and I travelled to Birmingham in the spring of 2010, to take part in a two-day boot-camp organized by skaters from the United States. We stayed in a hotel together and went to a supermarket nearby to stock up on food. We came back to the hotel laden with cheap pre-cooked cocktail sausages, nine tubes of Pringles crisps and a whole chocolate cake. We took photos of ourselves stuffing our faces with these salty, fatty, MSG-filled snacks. We laughed at ourselves and at the absurdity of calling ourselves athletes while delighting in such obviously un-athletic nutrition.

'Athletic fags' and 'athletic snacks' are jokes that work by making two contrasting concepts cohere, or at least be in close proximity, that otherwise would not; a 'combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement' (Bakhtin, 1984: 34). Participants put not taking themselves seriously side by side with identification as 'athletes', a claim for serious recognition. In doing so participants make a joke and laugh at imperatives to be serious and at their failure to live up to them. There is laugher at roller derby as 'sport for women who don't like sport' *and* as 'for people who really, really like sport. Athletic fags and snacks, and their

ambivalent, hybrid taking/not taking seriously are about making something new. Again we can see claims for recognition side by side with a joking disavowal, and something of a 'fuck you' to 'any kind of authority' who might find it hard to take seriously 'athletes' who revel in their unhealthy diets and sneak outside at half-time for a cheeky tab.

Self-organized women on roller skaters who sometimes wear fishnets and delight in knocking each other over can be just as troublesome of 'sport' as cigarettes and crisps are. Just as 'athlete' + 'cigarette' = a joke, women + sport, has often added up to the same result (see Chapter 2). Athletic fags synthesize an ambivalence towards both smoking and the 'athletic' imperative not to, which can stand in for desires for a recognition that does not turn on roller derby becoming what it was initially defined in opposition to. The shape of roller derby more broadly is a manifestation of participants' ambivalence towards difference from and critique of 'sport', *and* claims for recognition as real, serious sport.

Athletic fags and snacks, as jokes, make multiple moves; a laughing apology for not doing 'sport' properly, for not taking sport seriously, and a moment in which 'doing it properly' begins to emerge; laughing at the impossibility of roller derby being taken seriously without definitions of sport expanding, or without roller derby altering itself. Pauline Baynes does eventually modify her diet to include more protein and less sugar. The Beefcake does in 2012 give up smoking for good; the athlete's fag break is no more. In athletic fags and snacks however, linear movements from not taking, to taking seriously, are disrupted. Participants don't *only* laugh at their past-selves, unconcerned with getting taken seriously, they also laugh at their present selves trying on new 'serious' self-identifications.

In 'athletic fags' and 'athletic snacks' both 'sport' and 'roller derby' are subject to verification and to ridicule *and* both are allowed a continued state of possibility (Candea, 2011). Skaters do not naïvely believe in 'sport' as Sartre and de Beauvoir's conception of the 'serious attitude' would have it. Participants laugh at the imperative to 'be serious' to be recognizable, and laugh at themselves for not quite doing it properly. In these ambivalent and self-conscious moments being taken seriously emerges as a possibility. Laughter, or not taking oneself seriously,

facilitates shifts in what roller derby is and in its broader, gendered, relation to sport. This is not all that laughing and not-taking-seriously does however, both these attitudes also establish boundaries, between who does and does not have a legitimate claim to defining what roller derby is.

That those not immediately involved in the league might not recognize roller derby as a 'real, serious sport' is increasingly constituted by participants as a misrecognition, a mistake made by 'others' who don't know any better. Another way of saying this is that the claim that roller derby 'is not a sport', is itself not taken seriously by participants. These dynamics are at the fore when, in an early film-making workshop Sally Tape and Tiny Chancer evaluate a newspaper article (Schweitzer-Thompson, 2010) written about the league:

> TC: Yeah this was our first article that ever made it into the sports pages of any newspaper, and so I remember getting really excited about that, but then you read it and like two-thirds of the article is about derby names, fishnets, hot-pants [laughs]
>
> ST*:* There's actually hardly anything about the actual sport…
>
> TC: Yeah it's basically like a load of completely irrelevant information that's more about giving an idea about what sort of, style of person plays roller derby, you know an alternative person or however, I think it treats us as a bit of a kind of curiosity…

Sally Tape considers how the article could be improved:

> ST: So it's like nothing about all the crap, because obviously not everyone does know about roller derby and that's fine, but it's just like literally key points of like what the game is, and then the whole article is like a commentary of the game, and what happened in the game, like any normal football write up or rugby write up that's in the paper… if it's gonna be in the sports pages it should be an actual, what actually happened in the match… and not like this one that starts off like "in the bowels of [sports center]"
>
> TC: yeah it says, "suitably underground for this cult pursuit" [laughs]
>
> ST: yeah like how is a sport centre [laughs] how is a sports centre hall underground?! [laughs] It's like, it's perfectly suited to a sport, because it's a sports hall!

- film-making workshop, September 2011

Roller derby both is, and is not recognized as, a real, serious sport depending upon context and who is doing the recognition. When a journalist does not take roller derby seriously, they do not allow it a state of sustained possibility (Candea, 2011) but rather 'treat it as a kind of curiosity' and subject it to verification; the belief that roller derby is a serious sport is questioned, and rejected as a fantasy, 'however sporty the players might appear, they are not taking part in a sport' (Taylor A, 2011: n/p).

In the workshops however, the article itself was the occasion for laughter and ridicule. The journalist doesn't understand what roller derby *is*, they make mistakes; conceptualizing it as an 'underground, cult pursuit'. In Sally Tape's laughter there is an assumption that roller derby is a real, serious sport; Sally Tape does not take the journalist or the article seriously. Participants perceive that in the eyes of others roller derby is not taken seriously, and in turn this 'belief' of 'others' is subject to the verification and explanation of not being taken seriously by participants. Thinking about seriousness in this way means that it becomes closely connected to distinctions between 'self' and 'other' and/or 'us' and 'them' and to distinguishing a 'we' from those 'people whose beliefs one can legitimately challenge' (Viveiros de Castro, 2011: 136). The debate is over who should be taken seriously and over who can legitimately say what roller derby is.

Another set of additions and changes can be made to our diagrams and tables. What is, and is not taken seriously is flipped, as participants laugh at, and reject, those interpretations of roller derby that do not recognize it as a serious sport (figure 6.4). While much of participants' practice is orientated towards making roller derby more like sport, minimizing distinctions, the boundaries between who can and cannot legitimately claim to 'know' what roller derby is, are established and maintained (table 6.4). From this perspective 'we', who take roller derby seriously, challenge a 'they' who do not.

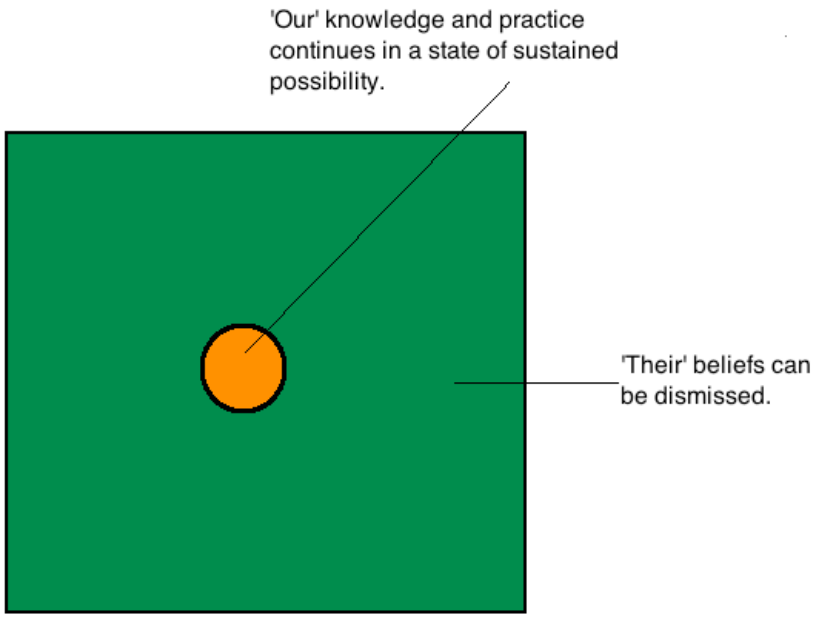


FIGURE 6.3 'THEM' & 'US' V3

'Then'	'Now'
'We' did not take roller derby seriously.	Most of 'us' take roller derby seriously.
Relatively unconcerned with recognition e.g. posters, logos & uniforms are not necessarily intelligible as 'sport'.	Claims are made for recognition e.g. posters & logos are redesigned, practices of dress shift.
'Rollergirls' do not necessarily take selves seriously, not straightforwardly intelligible as 'sport'.	'Athletes', take themselves seriously, intelligible as 'sport'
Not taking oneself seriously facilitates new identifications and self-representations to be safely played with and abandoned if necessary. Not taking oneself seriously enables the pursuit of serious recognition?	
Getting taken seriously is accompanied by an establishment and maintenance of boundaries as to *who* can legitimately define roller derby.	

TABLE 6.4 'THEN' & 'NOW' V4

In film-making workshops, participants were unequivocally dismissive of those existing documentaries, books and newspaper articles that failed to represent roller derby as a serious sport. Participants' ideas for how to better represent roller derby are instructive, developing as they do in direct response to the problem of not being taken seriously. Participants' plans for making a film are in part a manifestation of the aim of crafting a recognizable, and therefore inviting of serious recognition, intelligible representation of roller derby as sport, 'just like any normal football or rugby write-up'. In the planning workshops participants developed four 'key themes' for their film, one of which was representing roller derby 'as serious sport and ridiculous fun'. The inclusion of 'ridiculous fun' indicates that seriousness might not be the whole, or the only, story.

In the following extract participants discuss one possible suggestion for making their film:

> ST: '"By day, by night" is just [laughs] it's like what else do they think we do? It's not a professional sport so we're obviously going to have to earn some money…
>
> SF: Think if they made it about like amateur football players – they wouldn't be like "and here's Ross in his office, typing away"
>
> ST: yeah I know [laughs] that's what I mean I just don't get why [laughs] it's ridiculous
>
> SF: that would be one way to make a documentary, take a different sport, like a traditional male sport and just do it like a typical roller derby documentary
>
> TC: oh my god that would be hilarious
>
> - Film-making workshop September 2011

When Sally Tape and SF talk of 'by day, by night' they are referencing a convention in many existing roller derby documentary films. 'By day, by night' is a trope that positions playing roller derby as akin to taking on a super-hero like persona or alter ego, in contrast to often gender normative or otherwise respectable day jobs (primary school teacher, secretary, lawyer, doctor, and full-time mother are all

common reference points). The convention was common to many of the existing short documentaries about roller derby that participants reviewed in the workshop, and tends to include emphasis on tattoos, piercings, bruises, broken bones, and of course, fishnets. Needless to say 'by-day, by night' is very often dismissed by participants, as a hindrance to serious recognition.

The 'by-day, by-night' formulation is made fun of here, and dismissed as a miss-representation. More than this though, SF proposes making a film using this well-worn motif but applying it to 'a traditional male sport'. Such a suggestion also draws attention to and laughs at asymmetrically gendered articulations of 'seriousness' and 'sport' more broadly, at the disparity between representations of 'traditional male sports' and of roller derby. Finally this proposal laughs at imperatives to become intelligible within such terms, according to an idea of what serious sport looks like. In considering how to make representations of roller derby that present it recognizably as a serious sport, participants laugh at the gendered terms of 'seriousness' in other sports, traditionally played by men. In making a film about 'Ross in his office, typing away', participants *are* making a kind of claim for serious recognition, but they are doing it at the same time as drawing attention to the asymmetrically gendered terms, the sexist terms, of 'serious sport'. Skaters make claims for serious recognition *in and through* drawing attention to the terms of such a recognition.

In such moments there are elements of deliberate disinterestedness in recognition. Making a film about men playing football but doing so in the style of a typically sensational, gendered film about roller derby intervenes in a straightforward, opaque, serious representation of roller derby as 'sport'. This proposed film would not necessarily *make sense* to those others who persist in not taking roller derby seriously. It probably wouldn't convince, for example A Taylor (2011), so certain in his assertion that 'roller derby is not a sport'. Only those who are 'in on the joke' who are already familiar with, and perhaps weary of, 'by day, by night' would 'get' this representation. This imagined film is a joke by and for participants, produced 'for other producers' (Bourdieu, 1993: 51). The film erects boundaries between those who can and cannot legitimately subject roller derby to 'verification' and

'explanation'. The film laughs at those real and imagined others who are perceived as not taking it seriously, and it laughs at the gender dynamics that inform what is accepted or rejected as 'sport'.

Crucially, to make a film about 'Ross in his office, typing away' is to give an account of 'sport', in the style of roller derby; to hold football to account in the same terms that roller derby is commonly held to. Rather than a serious assimilation into 'sport', that is, rather than pursue serious recognition by making roller derby recognizable as sport, *'sport' is made non-recognizable as roller derby*. This proposed film is an inversion of the norm; it takes serious sport, 'traditional male sport' and turns it on its head, articulating it in the style of roller derby, rather than taking roller derby and articulating it in the style of 'serious sport'. Non-seriousness is transposed from roller derby on to 'typical male sport'. In the proposed film roller derby is not necessarily recognizable as 'sport'; rather 'sport' is made unrecognizable as 'sport'.

'Ross in his office, typing away' is a conversation about the gendered meaning of sport, and in this conversation roller derby is taken seriously, in the sense that Candea and de Castro have in mind; it is allowed a state of sustained possibility. 'Sport' on the other hand is not taken seriously. The proposed film is 'camp' in the way that Sontag defines it, putting 'everything in quotation marks' (1964: n/p) exposing the contingency of 'seriousness'. Such claims for recognition do not hinge on persuading others to take roller derby seriously, or on making roller derby legible, but rather *on not taking serious sport seriously*. 'Sport' is assessed, verified, and explicated on 'our' terms. Through inverting and transposing regimes of seriousness between roller derby and 'traditional male sport' a claim for recognition emerges that puts the contingency, and gender, of 'serious sport' front and center. Rather than roller derby becoming what was once opposed, 'sport' is imagined as becoming like roller derby.

‘Then’	‘Now’
‘We’ did not take roller derby seriously.	Most of ‘us’ take roller derby seriously.
Relatively unconcerned with recognition e.g. posters, logos & uniforms are not necessarily intelligible as ‘sport’.	Claims are made for recognition e.g. posters & logos are redesigned, practices of dress shift.
‘Rollergirls’ do not necessarily take selves seriously, not straightforwardly intelligible as ‘sport’.	‘Athletes’, take themselves seriously, intelligible as ‘sport’
Not taking oneself seriously facilitates new identifications and self-representations to be safely played with and abandoned if necessary. Not taking oneself seriously enables the pursuit of serious recognition?	
Getting taken seriously is accompanied by the establishment and maintenance of boundaries as to *who* can legitimately challenge what roller derby *is.*	
Getting taken seriously can involve not taking sport seriously.	

TABLE 6.5 ‘THEN’ & ‘NOW’ V5

Movement towards getting taken seriously, in participants practice, can involve the production of representations that are intentionally very difficult, if not impossible, for ‘others’ to take seriously and recognize as sport. In the remainder of this section I give an ethnographic account of one mediated interaction, that is about recognition, seriousness and the constitution of an ‘us’ and a ‘them’ that I think invites us to re-think what it means to pursue serious recognition and be taken seriously.

July 2011, on a sunny Saturday afternoon two skaters, Aladdin and The Beefcake, appeared on a local radio station to promote the league’s upcoming bouts. Lady Garden, Tiny Chancer and I pick up the frequency on Tiny Chancer’s smart phone and listen to the interview lying belly-down on the grass in the park. The radio host

keeps asking listeners to text in any questions that they have 'for the rollergirls'. So together in the park the three of us hatch a plan to cheekily text in, and between us we frantically remember the number and send in our first question, sent from my phone. The question we text in is:

What is your favourite eighties food?

The league was currently voting on names for the three new home teams soon to be inaugurated as part of the league's division into 'competitive' and 'non-competitive' wings. The suggestion that the new teams should be called *Team Prawn, Team Pineapple and Team Avocado*, or team names based on 'food that was popular in the 1980s' had developed in to a running in-joke. The league was somewhat divided over the issue of eighties-food team names, especially since such a theme did not fit with presenting a seriously sporting image. We giggle as we compose the text and look at each other to check that what we're plotting isn't too cheeky, perhaps it will annoy The Beefcake and Aladdin, since they are on the radio with the explicit and somewhat serious purpose of promoting the league's upcoming bouts.

As the bemused host reads our question out we can hear The Beefcake and Aladdin suppress their own laughter as they answer, they'll know it's us texting in, because Aladdin knew we'd be listening but also because of the ubiquity of in-jokes about 'eighties food' at that time. Aladdin takes the lead answering the question and extols the high-protein content of avocados and their virtues for an athletic, strength-building diet. We keep listening as The Beefcake details some of the rules of the game, emphasizing the full-contact and competitive aspects of the sport. The host is still asking listeners to text in, but there haven't been any more questions read out. For all we know we're the only people even listening, it is such a small and local station. The Beefcake emphasizes how serious roller derby is, how rule-governed game play is, and iterates how the rules state 'no kicking, no tripping, no punching, no biting'. 'Bites!' exclaims the interviewer, 'well it is played by women after all!'

Listening in we are shocked, but not surprised, and we shriek as we go over the outrageous, but very familiar, sensationalist gender stereotypes and assumptions of 'all-female', 'girl on girl action' that outsiders so often draw upon in attempts to

make sense of what roller derby is. In the park we quickly compose another question to text in, this time from Lady Garden's phone, and the host reads it out:

> Do you ever get frustrated with people trivializing your sport because it's played by women?

There is not a hint, as far as we can tell, of recognition in his voice. 'He doesn't get it, he doesn't get it' we wail, disappointed and yet gleefully validated at the same time by the host's obliviousness at his own implication in our thinly veiled accusation. The Beefcake answers, stressing how hard we work and that she's sure that once listeners come along to watch a bout they couldn't help but take what they see seriously, as a sport.

What were we doing, Lady Garden, Tiny Chancer and I when we send these two text messages? On one level we are making a joke, having fun, in collusion with The Beefcake and Aladdin, continuing an on-going conversation about getting taken seriously with our tongues firmly in our cheeks. Making jokes about avocados and prawns at the same time as calling out someone for their sexist trivialization of what we do are not necessarily incompatible. Both of these strategies are locally coherent responses to the problem of getting taken seriously, of being positioned as other to 'serious sport' in the first place. Both of the texts are more or less unintelligible to the deejay and to any non-initiated outsiders that may or may not be listening in. In their desires for serious recognition, participants necessarily, if only partially, refute the terms of such a recognition.

In the interplay between our text messages, The Beefcake and Aladdin's answers, and the radio host's mediation, a claim is made for serious recognition, and inclusion in a world of real, serious sport, at the same time as the terms of that very recognition and inclusion are negated, ridiculed and refused. We are articulating roller derby in ways that almost cannot be taken seriously, and asking for others to take roller derby, and all the absurdity that comes with it, seriously. In the interaction between our positions ('listeners' asking questions, the full meaning of which is only knowable to us; the deejay, unaware of exactly what is happening; and skaters playing it straight in efforts to make roller derby intelligible as real, serious sport) the difference

between talking about eighties food and talking about serious athletics begins to blur. It becomes clear that even when *being serious* Aladdin and The Beefcake bump up against a roller derby as not taken seriously by others by virtue of the genders of those playing it.

'Then'	**'Now'**
'We' did not take roller derby seriously.	Most of 'us' take roller derby seriously.
Relatively unconcerned with recognition e.g. posters, logos & uniforms are not necessarily intelligible as 'sport'.	Claims are made for recognition e.g. posters & logos are redesigned, practices of dress shift.
'Rollergirls' do not necessarily take selves seriously, not straightforwardly intelligible as 'sport'.	'Athletes', take themselves seriously, intelligible as 'sport'
Not taking oneself seriously facilitates new identifications and self-representations to be safely played with and abandoned if necessary. Not taking oneself seriously enables the pursuit of serious recognition?	
Getting taken seriously is accompanied by the establishment and maintenance of boundaries as to *who* can legitimately challenge what roller derby *is.*	
Getting taken seriously can involve not taking sport seriously.	
Illegibility, refusing recognition, is a resource.	

TABLE 6.6 'THEN' & 'NOW' V6

This is the context in which jokes about 80s food, and their circulation in self-referential, almost narcissistic texts to each other on the radio occur. Asking 'what is your favourite 80s food' is a strategy for engaging with the terms of serious recognition by scrambling, and refusing intelligibility in existing terms. In a context where 'Bites! Well it is played by women after all!' is indicative of a pervasively gendered landscape. Refusing intelligibility, making non-sense, means that

participants can exclude those who do not get it, who do not understand, behind a wall of in-jokes. Unintelligibility is a strategy for maintaining autonomy.

While both 'Ross in his office' and 'avocado radio' make claims for serious recognition in and through a disruption of the terms of such recognition, there is an important difference between these two instances. With 'Ross in his office' participants appear to take roller derby, but not 'sport', seriously, but with 'avocado radio' the skaters involved construct an interaction in which *neither and both* sport and roller derby are taken seriously. This doubled combination seems to be a way to allow both roller derby and sport the possibility of continued existence and at the same time to subject them both to verification, explication, challenge and change.

Summary & Discussion

In the wake of this chapter it is possible to make four cumulative statements:

1. Not taking oneself seriously enables new identifications to be tried on, and disavowed if necessary; not taking oneself seriously enables participants to experiment with 'serious' self-representations.
2. Being taken seriously implies establishing and negotiating distinctions, between who and what can be legitimately challenged, or can legitimately challenge 'us'.
3. Inversions and transpositions of what is, and is not, taken seriously work to expose the contingency of seriousness in sport.
4. In the production of representations that are deliberately very difficult to take seriously or recognize as sport, participants make claims for recognition at the same time as disrupting and refusing the terms of such intelligibility.

'Taking seriously' and 'not taking seriously' begin to blur and loose their meaning in the iteration and deliberate equivocation of this chapter. I want to suggest that this is precisely what happens in roller derby's and the league's movement towards serious recognition; taking and not taking seriously begin to, if not loose their definition entirely, then have their distinctiveness blurred to a degree where their difference becomes *almost* imperceptible.

At the gig organized for the league's fifth birthday celebrations in May 2012, SA shouted in my ear over the loud music 'we always say "oh it used to be such a

shambles", but look at this!' (field-notes, May 2013). SA doubles over in laughter as she gestures at the scene around us; chewy, sticky sweets from a piñata trodden into the floor; the giant, six foot by four foot birthday card has had a hole cut out of it that various skaters take turns to stick their naked buttocks through while others take photographs. It is easy for researcher and participant alike to get caught up with the task of keeping 'then' and 'now' separate and neatly delineated in the service of a future in which roller derby is unequivocally recognized as a real, serious, sport, but in and through such purification, hybrids proliferate (Latour, 1993).

At first, the pursuit of serious recognition appears to be a question of roller derby's movement from a position of relative unintelligibility, to recognition as a 'real, serious sport'. Roller derby as 'sport for women who don't like sport' is ambivalent, roller derby as 'sport', plain and simple, is certain, unambiguous; getting taken seriously appears to be a case of 'the fight of determination against ambiguity, of semantic precision against ambivalence' (Bauman, 1993: 7). After this chapter however it becomes evident that, more than simply changing roller derby to be recognizably commensurate with 'serious sport', more than demanding a serious status for the seemingly ridiculous, more than Bakhtinian temporary inversion, the pursuit of 'being taken seriously' is thoroughly intertwined with *not taking* oneself, or the terms of serious recognition, seriously. It is this interwoven combination that I want to call non-/seriousness.

Non-/seriousness is a way to designate ambivalence and plurality without recourse to the binary implications of *un*seriousness, or not-serious. When participants laugh at themselves as rollergirls and as athletes, smoke athletic fags, eat athletic snacks, plan films about 'Ross in his office' or send texts to a radio deejay about 80s food it is *not* necessarily the case that they are not taking themselves seriously or are entirely unconcerned with serious recognition. Rather, when skaters seek recognition as real serious sport, confront the impossibility of roller derby's recognition within existing terms, and refute complete intelligibility, distinctions between what representations are and are not conducive to serious recognition are kept open as they are repeatedly traversed in participants' practices of non-/seriousness. At the same time, distinctions

between who can and cannot lay a legitimate claim to defining roller derby, are enacted in the same non-/serious interactions.

When in the same breadth we ask Aladdin and The Beefcake to talk about food from the 1980s and berate the radio host's sexist assumptions, the separation between 'sport for women who don't like sport' and roller derby as 'for people who really, really like sport' is conjoined; 'the more we forbid ourselves to conceive of hybrids, the more possible their interbreeding becomes' (Latour, 1993: 12). Athletic fags are one articulation of this, one creative response as skaters make their way through the aporia of sport (we can do nothing against its laws) for women who don't like sport (we are absolutely free to make and re-make it as we see fit). It is not just athletic fags and athletic snacks. The whole of roller derby does this.

This chapter has analyzed how participants negotiate seriousness in practice, and the changes discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, in terms of non-/seriousness. In Chapter 7 I expand this analysis through a focus on elements of the explicitly 'made up' in the league, and especially in practices of *fantasy, parody* and *irony* that involve strong elements of 'make believe'. Chapter 7 thus further elucidates the centrality of non-/seriousness, elaborates upon the already problematized idea that the league became what it was once defined in opposition to and responds to the question of how participants continue to *make* their league at the same time as roller derby's increasingly institutionalization informs the possibilities and limits of their action.

In the process of writing this chapter I shared the simplified diagrams with participants, Aladdin laughs and asks me, 'where would you put yourself on that diagram?' (field-notes, August 2013). In the following interlude I explore how research, especially research methods, are related to seriousness.

INTERLUDE #3 Serious Research? Methods as techniques in pursuit of seriousness

Does doing research necessitate taking roller derby 'seriously'? As 'writing up' occupied more and more of my time, it became increasingly obvious that producing a thesis was also in part an exercise in getting taken seriously, in producing serious research, as well as giving an account of roller derby and the league; making roller derby serious as a research focus. Delivering conference presentations I have seen the confusion on faces in the audience as the words 'what is your favourite eighties food?' appeared on my slides, and as I tried to explain what happened and why I think it matters, why they should take me and the research seriously.

In this interstice I thus start from the observation that getting taken seriously is another point of connection between the research substance and research method, and suggest that research methods are techniques of seriousness, in pursuit of serious recognition. Here research can be understood as serious because it turns on assumptions of some congruence between saying and meaning. Research methods engage with principles of *validity* and the possibility of saying something that is *about something*, of making claims that correspond to an empirical actuality.

There were times when it felt like making field-notes, similar to doing the work of transcription, was a difficult if not impossible task. I listened to Aladdin and The Beefcake's radio interview lounging in the park with Lady Garden and Tiny Chancer in the rare sunshine of a Saturday afternoon. I wasn't there to 'do field-work', I was there to spend time with my friends. Moreover, we didn't (although we often did) spend hours discussing the conflicts arising around the restructuring of the league into competitive and non-competitive wings or the relationship between roller derby and sport. It was just a lazy few hours in the park talking idly and making jokes, laughing at ourselves and at the radio host. When I returned to my flat that evening I had a sense that what had taken place was somehow important, but I was filled with apathy for taking these silly, spontaneous moments and using them as research, and so I didn't write anything down.

Making field-notes (and doing research) rests on the premise that it is possible for spoken and written words to correspond to an empirical actually, to correspond to something that actually happened, words said and things done. Without the assumption that there can be a convergence, for example, between an empirical reality, field-notes and research output, research would loose its relevance if not its meaning. It is through research methods, techniques for 'collecting' or 'generating' data depending upon researchers' epistemological predilection, that claims for *validity* are established. It is through research methods, and the assessment of their relative character and merits, that researchers justify their ability to make valid claims, to say something meaningful.

The day after the incident with the radio in the park I force myself to sit down and pull together some scratch notes about what I think happened and what was said. I have referred to it many times since, both in conference papers and in conversations with skaters. Participants frequently reference and reinterpret events in the league's short history (see Chapter 4), and this fleeting moment from 2011 is no exception. In May 2013 Lady Garden is the 'featured skater' on the league's website, in her interview she tells the story of that day in the park as an example of why she loves roller derby, and she asks to see the accounts I have written to jog her memory. It is clear that making these interactions central to my account is one re-citation among others, that in itself is both contingent (I nearly didn't write it down…) and contributes to constructing the event as a tangible point of reference with ever more solidity. The meaning of our texts to the radio host emerges in interaction of course, it is through its reiterative citation that the 'event' both comes to matter and is subject to reinterpretation.

I want to think more about this episode and what happens when it becomes analytically central to a sociological account. Using jokes about avocados, prawns and pineapple for research necessitates taking them seriously in the sense that they are an important and deserving, appropriately meaningful subject of analysis. In effect this means making intelligible interactions that I have argued are deliberate negations of straightforward intelligibility; making sense of something that I posit as a deliberate exercise in not making sense. As I've already eluded too, using this

instance for research is (as with much else) an exercise in changing it into something that it wasn't intended to be; it becomes an illustrative example. Similarly, making these interactions a linchpin of my analysis necessitates taking them seriously in a second sense, my account of them is only meaningful to the extent that it refers, not only to something that 'really happened' but to what I suggest are broader elements of getting taken seriously in roller derby.

I think that the reasons I initially avoided making any notes about this afternoon in the park and the reasons why it eventually became so central to my argument are the same. Firstly, writing sociologically about this instance involves taking seriously, in a way, that which is supposedly quite difficult to take seriously, and moreover, that I am arguing is a deliberate refusal of the terms of serious recognition as they currently exist. Secondly, writing things down, the literal act of making field-notes assumes a 'serious' correspondence between 'what happened' and our experiences, memories and interpretations of the same. Again, writing field-notes is an exercise in deciding what to write down and what to leave out, from here it almost makes no sense to write anything down, as even if it were possible to write down 'what actually happened' it is such a partial thing, and anyway – how do I even know what happened?

The appropriateness of methodological allegory, of telling stories of roller derby and of research through each other, is central here. Allegory is a way to mean 'something other, and more, than what is being said' (Law, 2004: 88), and it is a method for non-coherent representation (ibid: 14). Centrally however, thinking allegorically alerts us to how 'there is nothing direct or literal about the link between present statements and the absent realities… that is what representation is: *allegory that denies its character as allegory*' (ibid: 88 emphasis original). I think allegory is thus also a way to play with the relationship between what you say and what you mean. I think that when we text our question about eighties food in to the radio host we both *mean it, seriously* and don't mean it; *it is only a joke* after all. When I write about the incident it is in itself allegorical, standing in for what I argue are the broader patterns in participants putting seriousness into practice and negotiate roller derby's relation to a broader field of sport. And then again, writing the story of avocados on the radio

becomes an allegory for the research's relation to research in general, and for what it means to do research with friends, in a context of shifting belonging.

Methods and methodology are about seriousness because they are about establishing a relation between saying and meaning; a congruence between representation and reality. Methods are techniques for linking statements and actualities, for establishing validity for being able to say 'this research should be taken seriously'. They are thus also tools put to use in contests over what should, and should not, be taken seriously. Graeber has recently elaborated upon how, just as 'imaginative play' has an '"as-if" quality that stands it apart from everyday affairs' (2013: 230), 'scientific truth claims' too, 'if they are made at all, retain that imaginative as-if quality' (ibid: 233). However, when it comes to the 'political relevance' of academic work, 'the as-if quality of the academic arena is allowing it to drift off from even being able to imagine it might be relevant to anything outside itself' (ibid: 235). To have relevance, to be serious, research must be intelligible. What happens, and what is at stake in purposeful refusals and incidental denials of intelligibility?

After leaving the league, doing research, especially doing analysis and writing, becomes about trying to find a way through, trying to find a way to keep moving and not get stuck 'just' being a researcher. I wanted to find a way to make something, something imperfect and incomplete, which did some kind of justice to what I think roller derby is and why I think it matters. In the next interlude, after Chapter 7, I consider relations between seriousness, research and intelligibility, and discuss how putting non-/seriousness into research practice could be one response, one way to keep moving, and perhaps one way to do research that is ambivalent about being research. I wonder if not taking seriously, refuting terms of intelligibility that can't be escaped, could be something that research also does? This is the heart of the matter, the heart of the thesis, how to become what was initially opposed without entirely erasing oneself in the process.

7. 'Making It Up': Fantasy, Parody & Irony

...people were just making it up as they went along [laughing]

The Beefcake, individual interview, October 2010

Feitico, feito ... the past participle of the Portuguese verb "to do, to make." As a noun, it means form, figure, configuration, but as an adjective, artificial, fabricated, factitious and finally, enchanted. Right from the start, the word's etymology refused... to choose between what is shaped by work and what is artificial; this refusal, this hesitation, induced fascination and brought on spells.

Latour 2010: 3

The league is made in its members' actions. Participants understood their DIY league, its organizational structures and their self-representations, as contingent outcomes of their collective action; 'you can control the direction that you're going in… you can give everybody a say… if people aren't happy you can look at if we could change the league in any way to try and make them happy…' (The Beefcake, individual interview, October 2010). There was, and continues to be, a sense among participants, to state it simply, that *the league can be whatever we want it to be*. However, in getting taken seriously the league is increasingly articulated with a sense of inevitability; 'we can't keep everyone happy, that's just the way it is' (Tiny Chancer, field-notes, November 2011). As participants put seriousness into practice; *actually, the league* can't *just be whatever we want it to be*:

> I was pleased when roller derby was recognized as a 'sport' because it legitimized the hard work it takes to be a skater to people that still 'joke' that it isn't really a sport. Having said that I still resent the fact that some random governing body have the right to decide what we as a community must do to be 'approved'.
>
> - Pauline Baynes, zine introduction, April 2013

Participants are struggling to have their cake and eat it too (Tiny Chancer, individual interview October 2010), to make roller derby recognizable as 'sport' without the league necessarily or entirely becoming what it was initially defined in opposition to.

In this chapter I focus on how the league that participants make solidifies and comes to react back upon the possibilities and limits of their future action. As Lady Garden puts it, 'I guess the sport has shaped me!'(zine-introduction, April 2013). The analysis takes place in a theoretical context of well-rehearsed tensions between how people 'are free to make and unmake their society, even as they render its law ineluctable, necessary and absolute' (Latour, 1993: 37). I use empirical material to join such conversations via an analysis of the league as explicitly *made-up*. The analysis turns on two, distinct but over-lapping, understandings of 'made-up'.

In the first sense, a working definition of 'made-up' is bound to how the league has been at times evidently, obviously crafted in and by participants' deliberate reflexive action. Especially between 2009 and 2011 policies are continually re-drafted and updated, 'we had a vote about how we should vote, about how the vote should be structured' (Lady Garden, field-notes, August 2011) and the league is re-structured. If the league was a piece of carpentry, we could see the joins and if it was pottery we could see the thumbprints in the still-wet clay; and both these artifacts would be subject to remodeling. The league has 'texxture' [sic], 'the kind of texture that is dense with offered information how, substantively, historically, materially, it came into being… [it] still bears the scars and uneven sheen of its making' (Sedgwick, 2003: 14). In sport more broadly, the rules that govern game-play are explicitly 'made-up', devised by governing bodies, ratified, reviewed, and applied in interaction. 'Made-up' means composed, produced, fabricated, manufactured, constructed, and contingent, malleable.

In a second sense 'made-up' conveys ideas of the fantastical, imaginary and fictitious; play-acting, masquerading and pretending all involve making things up. Derby names and derby wives accord with this definition, which is also bound up with imitation, simulation. For something to be made-up in this sense evokes notions of invention, inauthenticity and fakery; the 'made-up' does not correspond straightforwardly with a definite, prior, singular or independent reality (Law, 2011) but rather intervenes in it. Un-truths and unreality are made-up. For brevity and clarity I use 'make-believe' to refer to this second aspect of 'made-up' for the remainder of this chapter.

I use these terms rather than readily available sociological alternatives, such as 'constructed', to emphasize the everyday character of the empirical phenomena and to acknowledge a debt to Latour's work on 'fabrication'. The primary justification for such terminology however is the strategic polysemy and equivocation that 'made-up' allows for. The double meaning is there in the single phrase (Sedgwick, 2003: 14). There is a productive overlap between what is, for instance fabricated because it is made in interaction and that which is fabricated because it is a pretense or an 'untruth'. The two are linked by an 'as-if' quality, that characterizes, variously, narratives, games, social value, and scientific truth claims (Graeber, 2013). This brings us to the second analytical focus of the chapter, on the relationship between saying and meaning.

To be serious is to say what you mean, rather than 'just making it up'. Seriousness connotes credibility, genuineness, and authenticity, which hinge on a transparent and direct correspondence between what is said and what is meant. Seriousness is about the relationship between intent and realization, sign and signified. What does it mean, in this context, that participants go by self-evidently fabricated names, conduct 'marriage' ceremonies and take 'derby wives', display images of 'power animals' next to their team bench, and represent themselves as cartoon ponies, sock-puppets and unicorns? Each of these examples is an instance of non-/seriousness in practice. Moreover I want to suggest that participants navigate tensions between their own making of, and *being-made by*, their league through playing with the relationship between meaning and saying.

In what follows I firstly situate ideas of 'made-up' and 'make-believe' through a discussion of participants' understandings of voluntarism and constraint in their roller derby practice. Secondly, I discuss *fantasy* and return to the 'by day… by night…' motif and understandings of roller derby as different to or separate from everyday life. Thirdly I consider derby names and derby wives as *parodies* of 'real' names and 'real' marriages. Fourthly I focus on *irony* in participants' production of non-human self-representations; power animals, unicorns, cartoon ponies and puppets. Practices of fantasy, parody and irony are resources that participants draw upon in their movements between roller derby and their league as contingent

products of their own making and as existing beyond, and delineating, their collective action. Practices of fantasy, parody and irony are tools used both because of and despite the pursuit of serious recognition.

7.1 Made-up & Make-Believe

Before April 2008 roller derby was not played in Edinburgh. There were leagues in Glasgow, Birmingham and London, and throughout the USA; roller derby already existed, but we were yet to make it happen in Edinburgh. The early months of the league were contingent, there were times when it felt like roller derby would simply stop happening without the tremendous effort that many skaters put in to making it happen. The work it took, and the effort participants expended to keep the league going could not be taken for granted.

Contemporary roller derby is not well known; 'my family members, they always call it "roller blading" [laughter] or like "roller disco" or something…' (Francis Abraham, group interview, May 2011). Participants' friends, colleagues and family members, as well as academic interlocutors I've met along the way, often react with disbelief upon learning that roller derby is a 'real' phenomenon being played in their town, rather than a Hollywood fantasy or a 1980s sports-tainment television experiment with scripted stunts in which the action was not strictly 'real' (Chapter 1). Participants expunge contrived spectacle from contemporary roller derby; 'we're not hamming it up, like they used to' (The Beefcake, individual interview, October 2010), but other forms of the made-up remain.

As seriousness increasingly informed skaters' practice, the growing bureaucratization of the league was accompanied by a continuing sense of the mutability afforded by DIY organization. For example Sway, a strong proponent of competitiveness and WFTDA membership, asserts:

> We only have to be competitive, like we only have to join the WFTDA if that's what everyone wants to do, there's no point doing it if there's only 6 people who want to be competitive and another 60 that don't, that doesn't make any sense, that's the thing, we only have to do it if we want to, that's the important thing about DIY, it means you only do what the majority, wants to do…

- Sway, individual interview, May 2012

Participants continued to conceptualize roller derby as a space of self-determination:

> It's just a big fat "No! We like this shit! It's a blast! What else is fun? Lets do that too! Okay!" You know and there's no voices in our heads telling us what to do.
>
> - SF, individual interview, May 2011

Both these quotes articulate the league as a context where participants are *relatively free*, from self-censoring 'voices in our heads' and to decide what form their organization takes.

Explicit 'made-up-ness' intervenes in serious recognition, in establishing roller derby more broadly, as *not* 'just' made-up, and in achieving legitimacy through established institutions:

> It's really hard to convey this is just people figuring things out, there's no sort of hidden, like I think even WFTDA is just like figuring it out, from 10 years ago or whatever.
>
> - SF, individual interview, May 2011

At the same time participants also know that the league and their own practice within it are subject to influences beyond their own control and intentions:

> I guess, I don't think anybody *should* have to wear a certain uniform to play a team sport, but I think you'll be perceived differently if you don't, and we know that it effects the way that your sport's perceived, definitely and, you know, with a new sport, I guess it depends whether you *wanna* go down the route of going to the Olympics and taking it professionally, if we don't then it really doesn't matter and it shouldn't matter you know, and we're quite happy anyway, why do we need to bow to that pressure to then take it forward, but you know if we were playing, say football, and we were trying to play football for England then I wouldn't question the fact that we would have to wear some kind of, you know [laughing] football-friendly uniform, to be, you know to push that, the women's sport thing forward to try and be taken seriously, yeah, it's a weird one, like I would just really happily play roller derby forever, in my pajamas or whatever I pulled on in the morning you know, if I could skate in it

> then I would wear it but…
>
> - The Beefcake, individual interview, October 2010

The Beefcake tales off, leaving the implication of her 'but' hanging. There is belief and disbelief in voluntarism, how 'you can wear whatever you want', and a simultaneous dis-/belief in constraint, in how roller derby is 'perceived'.

Similarly Orville considers how 'of course people can wear what they want it doesn't matter… but not if you're playing a sport' (individual interview, June 2011) and Irene Brew discusses how:

> It actually doesn't matter what you wear, no it doesn't matter at all, but people are always going to look at you, you can't get away from how people will always make a judgment, you're always going to be judged.
>
> - Irene Brew, individual interview May 2012

Roller derby, the league, and participants' practice are, of course, always a mixture of voluntarism and constraint, moving between making and being made; 'in all our activities, what we fabricate goes beyond us' (Latour, 2010: 22). Irene Brew considers the league's 2011 re-structuring, often articulated as an unprecedented organizational change. However:

> They were big changes but in a way they were just a continuation, because they were a result of all the hard work that's happened over the years, like getting the committee structure going and stuff like that from years ago.
>
> - Irene Brew, individual interview May 2012

It is in such continuities that participants negotiate how while there are some things that they 'can't get away from' or 'wouldn't question' their decisions and their collective action *still matter*; movement towards serious recognition is bought about by participants' 'hard work' and conscious effort.

There are many theoretical precedents for understanding such tensions and dilemmas (Chapter 2). For instance, Latour argues that while Cartesian separations rely, firstly, on both 'nature' and 'society' as both made in human action and determining of

human action, and secondly on maintaining the separation, in theory, between these two supposedly contradictory statements, *in practice* 'everything happens in the middle' (1993: 39). A set of related distinctions are at play here, not only between voluntarism and determinism but also between theory and in practice. There is a 'violent separation' between:

> …the theoretical form of life, which takes this first distinction between objects and subjects seriously, and a quite different practical form of life in which we carry on in peace and quiet, without ever being able to make a definitive distinction between what we make with our own hands and what exists outside our hands. (Latour, 2010: 29)

What is separate in theory (what is made in 'our own hands' and that which 'exists outside' such making) is in practice resolutely conjoined.

Notions of 'belief' infuse existing accounts of the perennial structure/agency dilemma and often connote false consciousness (Marx, 1947). When The Beefcake reflects on what participants wear to play roller derby she both does and does not 'believe' in both absolute freedom and absolute determinism. Latour suggests that practices pass into action 'without the practitioner ever *believing* in the difference between construction and reality' (2010: 22, emphasis added). Viveiros de Castro (2011) and Candea (2011) demonstrate that in not taking seriously *beliefs* become subject to explication, verification and dismissal. Similarly, Graeber discusses how:

> [value systems] may propose a total view of the world, but it is not particularly important if the actors believe that this view is in any ultimate sense true, valid, or correct… value systems lead to the naturalization of arbitrary ideologies but not because they convince the actors that certain things are inevitable or written into the fundamental structure of reality… but rather because all these questions of ultimate value are simply irrelevant (2013: 229)

Belief depends 'on the distinction between knowledge and illusion, or rather… on the separation between practical life, which does not make this distinction – and theoretical life, which maintains it' (Latour, 2010; 11-12). 'Knowledge' is taken seriously and assumed to correspond to an independent, prior, definite and singular reality (Law, 2011) while 'illusion' is not taken seriously and interferes with any

assumed correspondence with 'reality'. Taking this theoretical precedent as a starting point, in the remainder of the chapter I analyze practices, grouped together under the term 'make believe' in which participants do not straightforwardly make such distinctions, or rather in which they play with various configurations of such separations between knowledge and illusion.

It is possible that the practical made-up-ness of the league draws attention to how a broader field of sport is similarly constituted in human action, and the prospect that it could be otherwise. Participants *know* that sport in general, and its terms, definition and parameters, are just as 'made up' as their league. Just as Orville questions whether there is a 'real difference' between fishnets and hot-pants, and 'what runners wear, and tennis players' (individual interview, June 2011), the contingency of the league and of roller derby can draw attention to the contingency of a broader field of sport.

In *make-believe* participants make objects and representations that foreground 'illusion', and interfere with relations between saying and meaning; in practices of *fantasy, parody* and *irony* participants move between sport, roller derby and their league as contingent products of their voluntarism and as immutable determinants of their behaviour. The next section returns to the 'by day… by night' formulation of roller derby as a fantastical twilight zone of permission and inversion.

7.2 Fantasy: Licensed Transgression

'By day… by night…' is a formulation that typically runs 'by day [insert name] works as a [insert gender normative or otherwise respectable day job] but by night becomes [insert derby name] and skates for [insert league]' (Chapter 6). The motif invokes a dramatic separation between roller derby and notions 'real life', and it is bound up with the idea that derby names indicate the development of an alter ego or persona. 'By day… by night…' infers fantastical super-hero-like personal transformation and articulates roller derby as a kitsch twilight zone of subversive inversion, perhaps with gender turned on its head. While most participants are wary of 'by day… by night' as a way to make sense of roller derby, this is only part of the story. 'By day… by night…' is a negotiation of the 'made-up'.

‘By day… by night’ aligns with other binary pairs in participants’ parlance, including ‘on track’/’off track’ and ‘derby name’/‘real name’. ‘Night’, ‘on track’ and derby names are evidently fabricated in participants’ action. Participants have used versions of these oppositions to explain their roller derby practice in contrast to the way they act or who they are in other areas of their lives, expressing a generalized difference between roller derby and ‘real life’:

> You know [real name] wouldn’t, like, slam into someone and send them flying but you know, [derby name] would, and it’s fine like I when I’m on the track I feel like I can do that, I don’t, obviously, often want to send people flying in real life or you know even if I do I don’t act on it [laughing]
>
> - Kathy Hacker, individual interview, October 2010
>
> Other girls go because they’ve got a lot of pent up aggression from just being in the house all day, looking after kids, being the nice mum, being the complete face of serenity and they keep their household going and all they want to do is get on track, skate like a demon and hit people.
>
> - Alabama Thunder Fuck, individual interview, June 2011

‘By day… by night’ involves elements of the fantastical and the make-believe, but moreover suggests that roller derby can function as a pressure valve, an opportunity to release the gendered frustrations of daily life. Such a formulation facilitates and enables transgressions of rules and norms that otherwise apply, and articulates roller derby as fantastical in the sense of imagining the implausible.

Constituting roller derby as separate from ‘real life’, and as enabled by and enabling of alternative identities, is about transgression and inversion of the expectations of normative or emphasized femininity:

> I think maybe people kind of need, that alternative identity almost, it’s like “yes well I am Mrs Smith or whatever but when I’m on track I am this alternative person so I can be aggressive and I can be strong and I can be fast and I can be powerful”, and then, that’s kind of who you are, bringing it out, ‘cause it’s not like it’s actually another person you know, it’s not like [derby name] is a completely different person, it is who I am, but I’m allowed to bring it out, and I’m allowed to just not hold back at

> all with it, I've spoken to other girls actually that say that they are more themselves with derby girls than they are with anybody else, they feel they're not gonna be judged for it, they can be anybody and it doesn't matter, they'll be accepted, so I think that might be a part of it… because it's a full contact sport, it's a time in your life to be aggressive when usually you're not, I mean how often are little girls encouraged to be aggressive, whereas for boys it's expected, for girls it's something to be ashamed of.
>
> - AY, individual interview, May 2011

Being aggressive, using your body 'instrumentally' and 'wishing you had a bigger ass' (Tiny Chancer, individual interview, October 2010), as well as skating 'like a demon', hitting people, and playing a sport that is 'violent and fast' are enabled 'by night'; roller derby is articulated as a space of permission, where skaters are '*allowed* to bring it out'. Playing roller derby thus becomes means of escape, from the dreariness of 'being in the house all day', and gendered expectations, tinged, by the fantastical development of new personas or by a relaxation of more usual norms discouraging, for example, aggression. 'By night…' then is an opportunity to do things otherwise prohibited, and a place where *some* of the rules of 'by day…' become contingent. As Grindstaff & West demonstrate in their research with cheerleading, 'there is a performance frame, in which everything is interpreted as "play" or "not real" and there is a reality frame associated with the broader life world' (2010: 145-146).

However, as serious recognition became more of an issue, participants increasingly dismissed 'by day… by night…' as outdated and irrelevant, and emphasized continuities between roller derby and 'real life':

> I don't really get this whole "by day by night" thing which is like "by day I work as whatever but by night I go on track and unleash, this person", that's not really what happens, I'm the same person so it's not like a weird transformation that takes place or anything.
>
> - Orville, individual interview, May 2011
>
> It is weird because when we first started out and I know there was a lot of talk about you know, you're a different person on track, than you are in your life, you know so its kind of like taking on this persona, taking on

> this name, um, but, I don't think I ever felt like that though, like I've always felt, and maybe a little bit at the start because you're doing something, like my job's quite a serious job, and then I'd go and play roller derby which is quite violent and fast and just, it's kind of two different ends of the spectrum in one day, so for that I guess, that probably fits into the thought around different name, different personality when you're on track, but the more I play the more I just, you know this is me and I'm playing roller derby [laugh] I don't think that I'm a different person on track than I am in my real life, really…
>
> - The Beefcake, individual interview, October 2010

There are tensions between separations from 'real life', and continuities with the same, as when Orville and The Beefcake emphasize being 'the same person'. First roller derby is made-up, and then getting taken seriously mandates that it is made commensurate with 'real life', rather than 'just a performance' (Grindstaff & West, 2010: 146).

Participants reconfigure roller derby simply as an opportunity to play sport:

> TC: some people say you know "actually this gives me a chance to let out this side of myself and when I'm being such and such [derby name] I can be aggressive, or powerful…"
>
> SF: which is cool, which is cool
>
> ST: it does let you act differently and things, but it's probably just your character playing sport, that's what comes out
>
> SF: yeah completely
>
> ST: like I feel different but that's because I've not played sport and I've not felt part of a team, and I've not really been competitive, and I've not wanted to win something, and that's what that's brought out, but that's just the sport and playing a sport it's not like [derby name] it's just me playing sport and that side of my character that I didn't know was there
>
> PD: its just your personality, [yeah] but sweatier
>
> - film-making workshop, September 2011

The fantastical is diminished, as roller derby becomes 'just your character playing *sport'*; a sport like any other sport. Ordinariness and pedestrian routine are

emphasized here, ‘it’s just me playing sport’, rather than the sensational form that roller derby is given in ‘by day… by night…’. ‘By day… by night’ becomes subject to ridicule, it is not conducive to serious recognition and in turn is not taken seriously by participants:

> M: I had one of my friend’s ex-boyfriends being like “oh you do roller derby? You’re too nice to be that aggressive” like what? Thanks!
>
> SF: You should have been like “well by night…” [laughter]
>
> TC: I was being interviewed for something, I was going on about like “oh yeah well when I’m on track I’m like this blah blah blah”, because they’d kind of asked me leading questions, then I found myself going like what the fuck, I’m just myself on track, I’m the same like over-excitable, easily angered, hyper person that I always am, I’m not a different person
>
> SF: Boy you should see me in the office [laughter]
>
> - film-making workshop, September 2011

So ‘by day… by night’ falls into the category of ‘what it used to be like’ as it is increasingly disavowed or made fun of by participants (Chapter 6).

However, formulations of roller derby as different or separate from ‘real life’ continue to mark participants’ articulations of their sports practice. In the summer of 2011, Tiny Chancer and I are volunteering as announcers for a bout between the league’s ‘B’ team and a visiting league. It was common practice at the time for announcers to fill gaps in the action with discussion of individual skaters’ particular skills and talents but also with more personal information, such as how long they’ve been skating for, or what they do ‘outside’ of roller derby. During such a lull I mention one skaters’ ‘day job’, saying ‘in real life GM is a teacher’. Tiny Chancer responds, ‘what are you talking about? This *is* real life!’ No more than ten minutes later, Tiny Chancer uses the same formulation, saying about another skater, ‘in real life…’. Despite its near-complete disavowal, distinctions between roller derby and real life continue to circulate.

Just as ‘by day… by night…’ opens up the possibility for reconfigurations of relations between femininity and sport, for example enabling participants to ‘be aggressive’, the incompatibility of femininity and sport is also played upon, and reiterated. SF shares her reaction to a roller derby documentary discussed in an early film-making workshop:

> I found it really generic, it was really bland, you see enough of these and you don’t even know what team they’re talking about anymore, it all blends together and it’s all the same thing, the same exact action shots, and it’s always focused on the hitting and then a bit of “by day, by night”, [laughs] [groan] which is the closest it comes to even mentioning that they’re women basically and then the implied thing that they never even address directly is that you know, your secretary is going to go and kick ass that night or something, so that’s the closest it even comes to talking about gender as this, as this you know, kind of insulting dichotomy that it brings up, but actually you don’t see it addressed very much, I mean obliquely sometimes, but it’s in this really sort of, it’s you know ah ‘we’re kicking ass’ and like its ‘women kicking ass’ and then it just stops there like that’s the entire, that’s the entire like interpretation, but I actually don’t feel like I’ve seen anything.
>
> - SF, film-making workshop, September 2011

In ‘by day… by night’, wanting a bigger ass, slamming into people, skating like a demon, roller derby itself and perhaps DIY sport in general, remain things that women only do when the sun goes down. ‘By day… by night’ articulates roller derby as a contained, temporary transgression, it enables and then diminishes any challenge that roller derby poses to either ‘sport’ or gender. The phrase is indicative both of a separation from ‘real life’ that facilitates transgressions of normative femininity *and* works to continue to position women playing a full contact sport as strange and unusual, reinforcing the idea of women athletes as ‘almost an oxymoron’ (Kimmel, 2000: xiii). There is an opening, in ‘by day… by night…’ for the development of new forms of sport and new configurations of gender, but such opportunity is contained, made possible only in the twilight zone of ‘by night’. Roller derby is positioned as an inversion of normative femininity, as something that perhaps requires the make-believe of derby names and a new persona, as something that happens under the cover of darkness, in a realm different or separate from ‘real life’.

Similar to participants smoking ‘athletic fags’, ‘by day… by night’ provides a safety net, and the ability to say ‘we don’t mean it, it’s only a joke’, *it isn’t real;* it is ‘just a performance’ or ‘only a game’. Conceptualizing roller derby as a fantastical, make-believe world enables skaters to try out new things, to minimize their discomfort and to position themselves at a safe distance from their transgressions. ‘By day… by night’ contains the very contingency it draws attention to and neutralizes the challenge it poses to the ‘real life’ of gender and sport. ‘By day… by night…’ flattens roller derby into terms that only make sense in a context where ‘sport’ and ‘women’ continue to be thought of as incompatible, where the only way that women’s sport makes sense, is in a kind of shadowy inverted alter-universe that only emerges ‘by night’. There is a risk of getting stuck, of remaining in the shadows, where ‘anything goes’ but nothing matters because ‘it’s only a joke’. Getting taken seriously requires changing what happens ‘by day’ too. In the following section I consider derby names in more detail, alongside derby wives and weddings, and argue that these practices are best interpreted in terms of parody and satire.

7.3 Parody: ‘Names’ & ‘Wives’

Derby names, and derby wives and weddings, are evidently made-up versions of, and exist in relation to, ‘real’ names and ‘real’ marriages. Derby names and derby marriages are obviously ‘fake’ in a way; they are not intended to be mistaken for ‘real’ names or marriages, both of which have legal statute in the ‘real world’. Both practices, but especially derby names, are subjects of contestation bound up with getting taken seriously. Moreover, their enactment, and obvious genesis in participants’ action, can be interpreted as parodic; derby names and derby wives are a kind of satire; they are camp (Sontag, 1964). Derby names are jokes that play on the meaning and character names in general.

Derby names are made up names that skaters adopt to ‘skate under’, participants use derby names, or their abbreviated versions, to refer to themselves and to each other. At the time of writing all league members use a derby name, including referees, although some fresh meat skaters choose not to use one until they become full members. Derby names are often deliberately funny or nonsensical, and can include puns, cultural references and other obscure connotations. Derby names have

previously been interpreted as a manifestation of skaters' alter egos, and read as intervening in normative femininity (Carlson, 2010; Finley, 2010). Examples of derby names from the league include Bint Imperial, Crotch Lightning, Fanny Thunders, LL Cool Gay, Mallory Powers, Minnie Riot and Skinner Alive.

In the league's early days participants would often laugh about not knowing each other's 'real names'; derby names were used almost exclusively. Until 2011 the league's Secretarial Committee was responsible for registering members' names on an international online database, intended to ensure the originality of every single derby name. An informal agreement stipulated that new skaters, upon concocting their name should check the database to ensure that no other skater was currently using it, and if they were, to ask out of politeness and courtesy, whether they minded sharing their name. The emphasis was on originality, the *work* inherent in constructing an imaginative name.

In 2010 and 2011 a small number of skaters in the UK stopped using a derby name and began skating under their real names. In the league there is a move towards having shortened 'surname' style versions of derby names on the backs of team shirts, instead of full derby names. As it becomes less common for skaters to unreservedly claim the adoption of a new persona or alter ego, derby names become an obstacle in the way of serious recognition, they 'take a bit of the focus off it being a sport' (The Beefcake, individual interview, October 2010). At the same time, derby names are articulated as something that doesn't, or shouldn't matter:

> If I call myself 'Mystery Ship' or 'Tiny Dancer' I can still play sport. The End.
>
> - Pauline Baynes, field-notes, September 2011

The meaning of names, real or fabricated, is more contingent here. Both The Beefcake and Pauline Baynes however, address themselves to the idea that made-up names are incompatible with playing real, serious sport. The Beefcake suggests a need to modify or abandon derby names, whilst Pauline rejects the idea; the implication of her assertion is that 'people outside' need to reassess their assumptions about 'serious sport'. While these tensions are commensurate with the

analysis of non-/seriousness in Chapter 6, here I consider derby names as parody, using the example of one skater-published blog article and participants' reactions to it; 'Derby Names Not Ready for Prime Time' (Snap, 2011).

The article, published on the popular *Derby Life* blog, caused a stir among participants in its promotion, not of the abandonment of derby names entirely, but rather for a move towards 'family-and-media-friendly' names, away from names that the author, Ginger Snap, classified as 'icky', 'dirty' or 'offensive' (Snap, 2011: n/p). Ginger Snap argues that such a shift is necessary for roller derby's recognition by television broadcast corporations and international sports industries:

> So…we want to take this sport to the next level? We want to be on ESPN? We want to be in the Olympics?
>
> How do you think we are going to get there with names like "Clitler" and do you think FoxSports is going to want to touch us when they hear that a skater's name will always have to be censored like we've already seen with "Clitty Clitty Bang Bang?"
>
> "Why aren't we in the Olympics?!" Well one reason could end up being that we have people taking names like "Baby Fuck Off."
>
> Don't be douchebags, derby nation. Lead by example. Take responsibility for your sport, your audience and yourselves. No matter who the sport is for – our current derby family or a bigger, future sporting incarnation, you make the rest of us look bad with your icky names. That's the dirtiest, filthiest truth of all – no matter what you name it.
>
> (Ginger Snap, 2011: n/p)

Participants' discussions of the article, for the most part, reject Ginger's arguments. Aladdin makes a point of publicly expressing her admiration of the names that Ginger criticizes, 'Clitler is the best name' (field-notes, September 2011). Similarly, after Pauline Bayne's links to the article on Facebook, Felicity comments, 'STOP MAKING JOKES GUYS. SRSLY' (field-notes, September 2011). Participants reassert the importance of irreverent humor and non-/serious laughter, especially at themselves; Ginger Snap takes herself too seriously.

Ginger doesn't reject derby names because they are made up, but rather locates the 'problem' in the properties of some – not all – derby names themselves. In her article the *meaning* of each name is fixed and inherent. By contrast, that meaning is always multiple and contestable becomes obvious when contributors to the 'comments' section of the article suggest that 'Ginger Snap' is a name that plays on popular slang for vaginas with ginger public hair. Ginger responds that no, her name is nothing more than an innocent reference to 'girl scout cookies' (Snap, 2011: n/p). Ginger doesn't object to derby names per se, just the 'icky' ones. In the article names that refer to rape and sexual violence are considered equivalent to names that include mention to sex acts and genitals. Arguing against such names in terms of obscenity makes it impossible to consider the nuances of, for example, rape survivors talking or laughing about rape. Ginger Snap's article conflates derby names being objectionable because they refer to rape, with derby names being objectionable because they mention clitorises.

In arguing that it is the 'icky-ness' of some derby names that create obstacles for roller derby's inclusion in international sport media industries, 'Derby Names Not Ready…' erases, and yet is implicated in, what I identify as the parodic effect of derby names by virtue of their obvious fabrication. Locating the 'problem' in individual names, like Clitty Clitty Bang Bang, elides vital discussion of the context that 'icky' names take place in, their deployment, their users' intentions, and their effects. Locating the problem in individual names, rather than in the characteristics of a broader field of sport in which women are routinely ignored, objectified or excluded (Chapter 2), erases the complexity of their meaning in practice. Evidently made-up derby names can intervene in, and ridicule a broader gendered landscape of sport.

Derby names that reference clitorises in the same breath as Hitler and/or a children's movie about a car that comes to life do much more than simply prevent the mass televising of roller derby by virtue of their lack of family-friendliness. Referencing date-rape drugs and sex organs in made-up names used to play a sport, while making claims for serious recognition, have the potential to draw attention to the sexism, sexual violence and gender inequality of sport in general (Chapter 2). I am not

suggesting that this is what participants deliberately set out to achieve in derby names, rather I don't think that derby names can be understood exclusively in terms of desires for sporting recognition, but need to be thought of as an instance of participants playing with the *meaning* of made-up names.

Even family-friendly 'clean' names, like Mystery Ship, intervene in roller derby's recognizability as real, serious sport, because they have the potential to raise questions about the 'authenticity' of 'real' names. In their explicit, and self-consciously humourous fabrication derby names exaggerate the made-up character of all names, and the make-believe involved in their construction. Derby names are jokes that play on the meaning and character names in general; roller derby is a joke that plays on, and intervenes in, the meaning and character of a broader field of sport.

Derby names are an instance of skaters playing with signification, with the relationship between saying and meaning. I think the reason that participants are so dismissive of Ginger Snap's blog article is because she fixes the meaning of the derby names she discusses; Clitty Clitty Bang Bang, in such a formulation is only 'about' one thing, obscenity as a barrier to recognition. The blog article takes derby names literally when they were never intended that way. In his work on 'trickster' mythology Hyde (1998: 272-3) describes the 'game of dozens' in which players trade insults to family members. The point of the game is to not take such insults too seriously, 'to play with language… to stay in *balance* on the line between the playful and the serious' (ibid: 272, emphasis original). For Hyde 'dozens' is about recognizing that the words exchanged in the game *are serious*, 'there's no insult if this isn't serious' and at the same time that such 'seriousness is infused with humour, the game depends on it' (ibid: 273).

For Hyde 'antagonists in a game of dozens play with the difference between meaning something and just saying it' (1998: 273). I think that in derby names participants play not with the difference, necessarily, between meaning and saying, but with the relationship between the two. Just as Ginger Snap's article forecloses the multiplicity and mutability of meaning in derby names, the loser in a game of dozens 'commits himself [sic] to the culturally approved side of this string of dualities… he gets serious, attached, defensive' (ibid: 274). To succeed at a game of dozens, is to

'refrain from committing to a single side of such contraction' (ibid: 274). Derby names are a way for participants to move between roller derby and the league as made-up products of their own action and determining influences on such action, and a way to engage with desires and imperatives for serious recognition without 'getting serious, attached, defensive', without 'committing to a single of the contradiction' and without the league necessarily becoming what it was initially defined in opposition to.

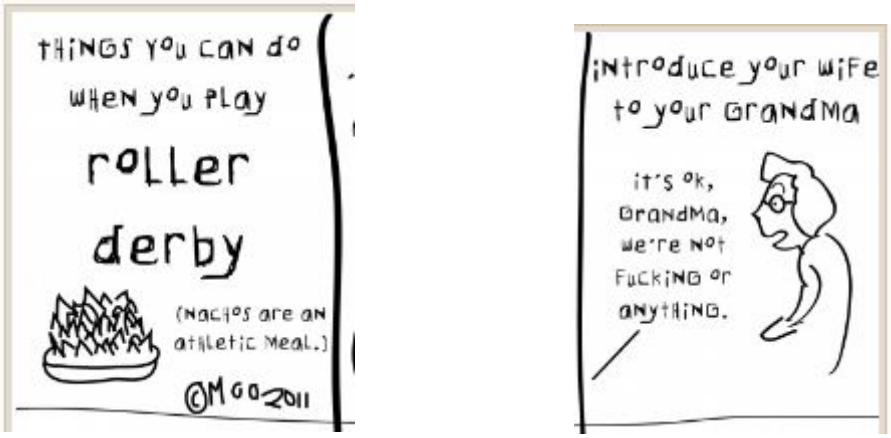
This analysis is elaborated by looking at derby wives and derby weddings. As is common across the UK and USA, since the first years of the league skaters have 'got engaged' and married each other in makeshift 'marriage' ceremonies, mostly in pubs and bars and during after-parties. Pauline Baynes asked me to marry her, presenting me with a 'ring' made from a dirty drinks straw, in the pub after our first ever bout in 2008. I said yes and we married each other the following year, in another pub after another bout against Glasgow. Owlison presided over the ceremony and Sally Tape, Aladdin and Amelia were bridesmaids. Derby weddings sometimes involve reading out derby marriage vows (Barbee & Cohen, 2010:104-107), which are popularly attributed to Kasey Bomber, a skater from Los Angeles, and were devised for the first en masse derby weddings in Las Vegas in 2005 (ibid).

I ask Lady Garden how she would explain derby wives to someone who'd never heard of the practice:

> I'd say they were exactly the same as real wives, as wives in the world… just another type of wife, it is a serious, committed long term relationship, within roller derby they fulfill all the functions of wives. They are wives. It is just as difficult to say what a derby wife is as it is to say what a wife in the world is, it might involve having a ceremony, skating together, having funny t-shirts, always staying in a room together when you're on a derby road trip, always having lifts together, bitching about other people in the league, being supportive when they're injured… it might involve any combination of these things or it might involve none of them. (field-notes, November 2011)

Lady Garden emphasizes the similarities between derby wives and 'real wives… in the world', refusing to see derby marriages as significantly different from 'real' marriages.

In practice of course derby marriage is both similar and different to marriage 'in the world'. Jayne Grey and Mallory Powers have two sets of matching shirts, Jayne's read 'Brawn' and 'Strife' and Mallory's read 'Brains' and 'Trouble' respectively. Sally Tape and Aladdin drew a picture of themselves together, framed it and put it up on the living-room wall of their shared flat. Sway wore her 'real' wedding dress, which she had bought to marry her partner in, for her derby wedding ceremony, conducted by a referee dressed up as Elvis in the basement of a bar after a bout against Leeds on Valentines Day, 2010. Some skaters take multiple wives; I had three at one point. In one of her comic-strip blogs, 'Things you can do when you play roller derby', Tilda plays on the differences between 'real' and derby wives:



7.1 FROM 'THINGS YOU CAN DO WHEN YOU PLAY ROLLER DERBY', DEATH BY GARAGE DOOR JULY 2011 COURTESY OF TILDA.

Similarly a popular t-shirt was available, and the subject of much laughter, around the same time, it read; 'I'm not gay but my derby wife is' (field-notes, June 2010, and see Murray, 2012). Both these instances foreground the platonic, non-sexual character of derby marriages, in contrast to 'real' relationships. In discussing her derby wife KT is careful to mention that she had to make sure her *real* wife was okay with her derby marriage, and explain how it wasn't a threat to their own romantic, monogamous, long-term civil partnership (individual interview, June 2011).

Derby wives and weddings are, and do, many things; Murray (2012) made them a main empirical focus of her PhD. My particular concern however is with how derby marriages, similar to derby names, draw attention to the contingency of 'real' marriage. In derby weddings, marriage is exaggerated and re-cited as 'marriage', in camp quotation marks (Sontag, 1964). Derby marriages are not 'real' marriages but they are real 'marriages'. In such parody there is the possibility that 'real' marriage becomes subject to the same camp quotation marks. While 'by day… by night…' allows skaters the option of distancing themselves from their gender transgressions and the challenges that roller derby poses to 'sport' through the get out clause of 'it's only a joke', derby names and derby weddings add to this dynamic and allow skaters to point and say 'look, it is *all* only a joke'.

Through derby names and derby weddings, skaters draw attention to the contingent made-up-ness not just of roller derby, but of the 'real' world too. Derby names and derby wives, in relation to their 'real' counterparts, articulate the same relation that roller derby has to 'sport'. Derby names and derby wives are jokes that play on the meaning, and character of 'real' names, and 'real' weddings; roller derby is, in part, a joke that plays on, and intervenes in, the meaning and character of a broader field of sport.

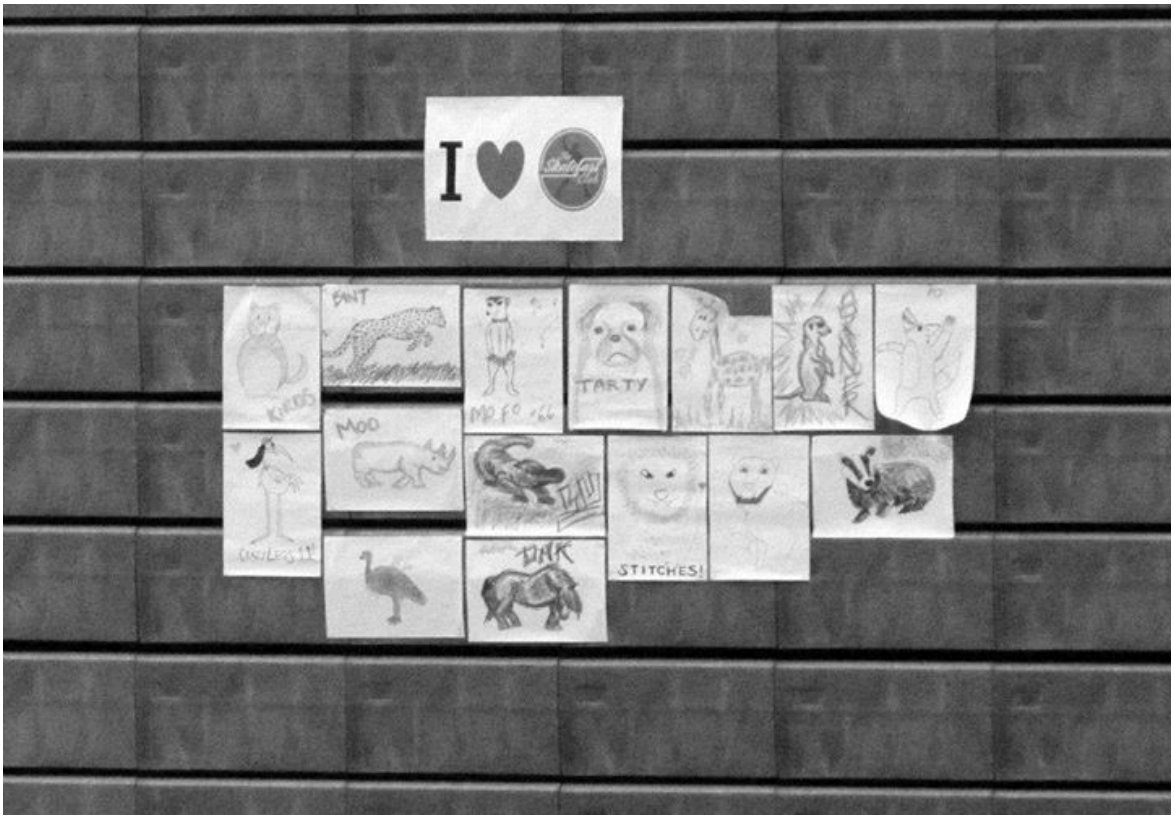
I now move on to a final, set of practices that are explicitly made-up, each of which involves participants' creation of non-human self-representations; 'power animals', unicorns, cartoon ponies, and puppets. I analyze these practices as instances of irony and argue that through such make-believe participants work to remain on a threshold between what they make and what makes them.

7.4 Irony: Staying on the Threshold

'Power animals', unicorns, cartoon ponies, and puppets are further examples of made-up, make-believe practices that are non-/serious and that are jokes. These examples elaborate the issues already considered; I want to suggest that we can think about 'power animals', unicorns, cartoon ponies, and puppets as ironic, as a particular way of meaning something other, or more than, what is said. Thus these practices are a way not 'out', 'through' or 'beyond' impasses between voluntarism

and determinism, but rather are a way to keep moving between the two, to occupy a productive middle-ground of agency; a way to stay on the threshold between making and being made.

My first encounter with 'power animals' was at a bout in April 2011, I had traveled by coach to Aberdeen with the 'B' team and ref crew, to volunteer as an announcer for the bout. We arrived early and while we waited around, sat against the wall in the sports hall, The Beefcake and I mess around drawing 'power animals'. I draw a panda, The Beefcake draws a beaver and a unicorn, Sally Tape joins us later and draws another unicorn, Owlison asks The Beefcake to draw an owl. There is no discussion of what a 'power animal' is, we just draw them and laugh at them until it's time to get into our respective positions ready for the bout to start.



7.2 POWER ANIMALS, HOME BOUT, MARCH 2013. COURTESY OF PERIOD DRAMA.

7.3 Power Animals Behind the Skatefast Club's team bench, Home Bout, March 2013. Courtesy of Period Drama.

Figure 7.4 Power Animals on the 'A' Team's Trip to the USA, July 2013. Courtesy of Period Drama.

The power animals are gaffer taped to the wall behind the team bench. The crumpled sheets of paper stay in the kit bag, along with spare mouth-guards and helmet covers, for months, and are displayed on the wall behind each team bench for each 'B' team bout. Period Drama recalls how one team wouldn't let them post up the power animals, fearing that the tape would damage the paintwork (film-making workshop, September 2011); 'they' took themselves too seriously, and didn't have as much fun as 'we' did. In November that year, in advance of a bout in Newcastle, I am at Period Drama's flat to write line-ups and discuss strategy, which we do fairly quickly before moving on to draw 'new power animals'; Period Drama is concerned that the old drawings of unicorns, beavers and pandas are getting too tattered. I draw another panda, Period Drama draws a narwhale.

Power animals become a ritual at many different bouts. Figures 7.2 and 7.3 are taken from a home bout in early 2013. Not only the 'B' team but the league's home teams, and 'A' team adopt power animals as their own (figure 7.4). Power animals diffuse into other league activities too. When, mid-2011, the Design Committee created a selection of proposed new logos, a unicorn head with an anchor tattoo framed by the league's name is one – serious – suggestion, ultimately rejected as 'too cluttered'. Unicorns are a feature of film-making workshops:

> But there are things that [league] can do that are very [league], it's that quirky kind of humour that we have, like power animals, you could have like an animated unicorn running across the screen while someone's talking very sincerely about our progression and skill…
>
> - TT, film-making workshop, September 2011

Participants discuss the possibility of making their film in the genre of magical realism:

> PD: it's a straight narrative in a way but then stuff just happens that's magic…
>
> FB: so in roller derby that would be like we were playing a bout and someone turned into a badger or something
>
> ST: a unicorn

SF: yeah exactly

TC: magic rainbow unicorn kittens

- film-making workshop, September 2011

FIGURE 7.5 LONDON BRAWLING AND THE 'BRAWLICORN', SEPTEMBER 2013. COURTESY OF LORNA BROWN.

FIGURE 7.6 LONDON BRAWLING AND THE 'BRAWLICORN', SEPTEMBER 2013. COURTESY OF LORNA BROWN.

A men's pick-up bout in April 2010 is between 'Team Unicorn' and 'Team Kitten'. In 2013 the primary jammer for London's increasingly internationally successful travel team, London Brawling, takes a plastic full-head unicorn mask on their tour of the US's West Coast and is photographed prolifically in various locations wearing the mask (figures 7.5 & 7.6).

In Autumn 2012 members of the league used an online animation application to make their own 'My Little Pony'-style cartoon self-representations. In November 2012 the league's 'A' team compete at a WFTDA European tournament. In the tournament programme, as is usual, each team has one page to display their skaters' 'headshots', normally a photograph of each skater accompanied by their name and number. The team however, decided to use their personalized cartoon ponies instead (figure 7.7).

FIGURE 7.7 'TRACK QUEENS: BATTLE ROYAL' 'HEADSHOTS' NOVEMBER 2012 COURTESY OF PERIOD DRAMA.

The final example of skaters' creation and use of non-human representational forms is drawn again from film-making workshops, in which participants suggested using sock-puppets, or wooden-spoon puppets to represent themselves on film.

> T: or like puppets
>
> TT: puppets, oh yeah you could have like puppets made out of stripy socks
>
> T: amazing, we could all have our own power animal puppet who is interviewing us and we could talk to the puppet
>
> SA: I like that idea
>
> TT: like a wooden spoon puppet with a little face and a little dress, that could be really nice
>
> T: you can see the excitement in your face
>
> TT: I'd like a stripy sock puppet
>
> T: we could basically make it a bit like The Muppets
>
> MB: do you think that some people might say that that was like not taking the sport seriously?
>
> TT: probably
>
> MB: and does that matter?
>
> T: but if we can laugh at it I mean that's different isn't it
>
> - film-making workshop, September 2011

In each of these practices artifacts and images are constructed or imagined in which skaters' fabricating work is ever more explicit. Non-human figures, whether clumsily drawn pandas or wooden spoons with faces drawn on them, are similar to 'team prawn, time pineapple and team avocado' in that they are very difficult, if not impossible, to take seriously.

It is possible to consider these examples in relation to more established sports practices, such as the use of animals in team branding, and mascot-figures, or employees dressed up as 'Wenlock and Mandeville' for the London 2012 Olympic

and Paralympic Games. Of course it is possible to argue that there is 'no difference' between power animals and the mascots of 'real, serious sport'. What difference there is however, comes from the context. In these practices participants are not intending to make mascots, this is something else. Occasionally an injured or newer skater will dress up as a 'mascot', most often a pirate, and skate around the audience at bouts. Incongruity arises because power animals are not yet or necessarily intelligible in the same way, e.g. as Olympic mascots, just as roller derby is not yet straightforwardly intelligible as 'sport'. Wooden spoon puppets and cartoon pony figures complicate the picture further; these things are not mascots but rather representations of participants themselves.

I want to suggest that the practices described here can be best understood as ironic, as jokes that work allegorically. In common usage irony is about expressing meaning using language that would ordinarily mean something else. Irony is bound up with sarcasm, but also with that which is deliberately contrary to expectations. Power animals and unicorns are not necessarily what we would expect, given participants' concern with serious recognition. Irony is about ridicule but also paradox and incongruity. Rorty argues that irony is a *private* stance, 'ironist philosophers are private philosophers… Their work is ill-suited to public purposes' (1989: 94-95). In contrast, I want to argue for a more public, generative, non-/serious irony. 'Power animals', unicorns, cartoon ponies, and puppets are conversations about getting taken seriously, a way to intervene in relations between saying and meaning and a manifestation of skaters' negotiation of making, and being made. Irony is a resource through which participants negotiate getting taken seriously.

Additionally, Rorty defines irony in terms of absolute contingency; ironists are 'never quite able to take themselves seriously because [they are] always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change' (1989: 73-74). However, absolute contingency is not what skaters do with irony; drawing attention to mutability is but one element, a first step. Irony is much more complicated than that when it comes to people working together to make something new, and in doing so to shift the configuration of a broader field of sport. Graeber's discussion of Zimbardo's infamous Stanford Prison Experiment is useful to think with here.

‘Participants knew that the scenario was imaginary… yet it quickly turned into a kind of game… and once it had, none of that came to matter any more.’ (Graeber, 2013: 229). The central point is how, once invested in the stakes, the real-ness of the game, of the context, ceases to matter:

> Anyone who has played a game understands how this can happen. In fact, if people care about the stakes, it almost invariably does. Yet social theorists often seem strangely oblivious to the implications. (ibid: 229-230)

Drawing on Rorty and Graeber together here, it seems that we are all ironists, who don’t necessarily believe in ‘the terms we use to describe ourselves’, or the rules of whatever particular game we happen to be playing (roller derby, academia…) but continue to play nonetheless, because we are invested and interested in the stakes. Participants use non-human representations ironically to ‘play the game’ of *getting taken seriously* whilst showing that they know it is only a game *and* trying to intervene in its rules, intervene in its stakes.

Skaters’ experiences of roller derby’s dismissal as ‘not real sport’ mean that they are aware of contestation, of how ‘nothing has an intrinsic nature, a real essence’ (Rorty, 1989; 74) but this is only one half of the story. Irony here is not just a way to refuse any inherent meaning, it is a way to remain in a space where meaning both matters and does not matter. ‘Power animals’, unicorns, cartoon ponies, and puppets are a way to say a variety of things at once, a way for participants to make multiple propositions:

> *We don’t care if you take us seriously or not…*
>
> *We can do what ever we want…*
>
> *Others should, must take us seriously…*
>
> *We should change roller derby so that others take it seriously…*
>
> *No one is going to take us seriously anyway, we might as well have a laugh…*
>
> *It’s easier to believe in unicorns and power animals than for an emergent, DIY, women’s sport to be taken seriously…*

Roller derby is impossible to take seriously given the current configuration of a broader field of sport…

'Power animals', unicorns, cartoon ponies, and puppets, rather than only or exclusively calling attention to the contingency of 'sport', as I have suggested derby names and derby wives do, are a form of *deliberate equivocation*. These drawings, puppets and cartoons make it difficult to take roller derby seriously. Irony here is allegorical, in that 'power animals', unicorns, cartoon ponies, and puppets are a way to mean something other than what these words and images 'say', something *more than* what they say. It is not an erasure of meaning, reality, truth or inevitability, but multiplication; it is that 'everything is contingent' *and* it all still matters.

Unicorns and power animals can stand-in for roller derby. 'Everyone knows' that unicorns and power animals *aren't real*; everyone knows that roller derby is a 'made-up' sport. The examples considered in this section are practices of making new *things*, made-up artifacts in which the work of human hands is undeniable, at the same time as they evoke the fantastical. Power animals, unicorns, cartoon ponies and puppets, like policies, governing bodies, membership criteria - like roller derby and like a broader field of sport - can simultaneously be believed in and not believed in. Power animals, unicorns, cartoon ponies and puppets are non-/serious responses to the problem of how to work together to make something new, and how to establish it as something not that isn't 'only' made-up, that isn't 'just' a fabrication.

Using cartoon ponies and hand-made puppets as representations is one way to move, to cross over back and forth, between the meaning of roller derby, and its position in a broader field of sport as both contingent and inevitable. Contingent because the very existence of these practices evidences one version of how skaters can do 'whatever they like'. Inevitable because their existence is also a demonstration of the impossibility of roller derby being taken seriously without 'sport' being reconfigured or without the league itself becoming what it was initially defined in opposition to.

'Power animals', unicorns, cartoon ponies, and puppets are all examples of participants working to remain on the threshold between contingency and inevitability because in their explicit made-up-ness these things refuse the distinction

between what is fabricated by human agency and that which goes beyond it. These examples all have an excess of make-believe, too much exaggeration of what roller derby is, to be taken seriously. 'Power animals', unicorns, cartoon ponies, and puppets are one way that participants negotiate making and being made, and contribute to a struggle for position in a broader field of sport, without erasing what roller derby is in the process; a way to make claims for seriousness without (entirely) becoming what was once opposed.

Summary & Discussion

All the examples considered in this chapter are qualitatively similar to those of Chapter 6, in that they are almost 'impossible' to take seriously. It is through non-/serious practices of fantasy, parody and irony that participants simultaneously enact the contingency and inevitability of their roller derby practice, at once believing and not believing in the voluntarism of their own action and the determining powers of the structures they create and find themselves in. Classifying 'by day… by night…', derby names and derby wives, and power animals *et al.* as fantastical, parodic and ironic respectively elucidates how participants negotiate tensions between possibilities and limits in their league, roller derby and a broader field of sport. In the made-up and make-believe participants navigate getting stuck, working to find a way through, and trying to stay in-between, on the threshold between making and being made:

> The factish can therefore be defined as the *wisdom of the passage;* as that which allows one to pass from fabrication to reality; as that which gives *an autonomy we do not possess to beings that do not possess it either,* but that by this very token give it to us. (Latour, 2010: 35, emphasis original)

Contrasting roller derby to 'real life', as a 'fictive world of "play", within which messages and symbols are recognized in a certain sense as not-true' (Grindstaff & West, 2010: 159) makes roller derby a licensed and temporary transgression that reinforces the norms it otherwise transgresses (Bakhtin, 1984; Hyde, 1998). However, in participants' disavowal of these ways of understanding roller derby, and especially in the parody of 'names' and 'wives' and the irony of non-human self-

representations their *laughter* 'adds something useful to contradiction' (Hyde, 1998: 274).

Instead of positioning roller derby in purely negative or oppositional relation to either 'real life' or to 'sport', in parodic and ironic *jokes* participants avoid a 'trap of mere opposition' by always keeping moving along a 'corridor of humour' (Hyde, 1998: 274). As long as participants *don't take themselves too seriously* roller derby's ambivalent relation to 'sport' can continue, and participants can pursue serious recognition without *entirely* sacrificing their ideas of roller derby as special or different; participants can be both interested and disinterested in the stakes of the game of serious sport: 'To treat ambivalence with humour is to keep it loose; humour oils the joint where contradictions meet' (ibid). Another way to say this is that parody and irony are simply ways that participants *have fun.*

In considering how participants make their league just as the identities, meanings, relationships and organizational structures that they construct in turn inform the possibilities and limits of their future action, or how 'even though we construct Society through and through, it lasts, it surpasses us, it dominate us, it has its own laws' (Latour, 1993: 37) it becomes apparent that these issues are also questions of social solidarity, of creating a stable group and group identity. In Chapters 4 and 5 I detailed how participants position 'having fun' in the past; it is jettisoned in favour of competition and winning games. In this context derby names, wives and silly drawings appear as a way to *keep having fun*; a way to carry on doing what is no longer the primary goal, or institutionally encoded end, that the league orientates itself toward.

Derby names, power animals, sock puppets and unicorns thus begin to appear as a hangover from roller derby's recent, but hastily historicized, past. These examples are a way for the 'fun' to continue, but more than this, they are a way for participants to do another set of two things at once. The practices I describe above as parody and irony are, firstly ways for participants to engage with a romanticized and reconstructed idyllic past, that has been (not entirely) sacrificed in pursuit of serious recognition; a way to 'say' *wasn't it great back then.* Secondly, these same practices are a way for participants to laugh at the very same dynamic, just as they enact it; a

way to 'say' *weren't we naïve back then, thank goodness we know better now.* Crucially, parody and irony are a way for participants to continue on in the knowledge/belief that, whichever of these interpretations they adopt, roller derby and the league are products of their own collective action. As participants laugh at themselves, fantasy, but especially parody and irony, enable the contingency of *making it up* to continue, because of and despite, the constraints that they increasingly encounter.

Before drawing the thesis to a close in the concluding chapter, I present one final interlude, in which I devise, tongue-in-cheek, a manifesto for non-/serious research, at 'the proper place for anthropology to erect its watchtower: the crossroads of sense and nonsense' (Viveiros de Castro, 2011: 142).

INTERLUDE #4 Non-/Serious Research?

My dad likes to tell jokes that aren't funny. One of his favourites is:

> A bear walks in to a barber's shop, and asks the barber for a shave. 'Sorry bear', says the barber, 'we have no soap, *nor brush*'.

After every telling (and there have been many) he would sit and smirk mischievously, laughing at how nobody got the joke. The joke doesn't make any sense of course; the joke is that it is not a joke.

Successful ethnographic participation is often a question of 'getting the joke'; the idea being that understanding the nuances and double-entendres of humour in a specific cultural context is a marker of successful integration and ethnographic understanding. Jokes, like allegory, often turn on deliberate multiplicity of meaning and ambivalences, such as the tension between seeking to be taken seriously and refusing to be taken seriously. Analyzing 'power animals' for instance, is an exercise in advancing an interpretation of what they *mean*, perhaps even what they *really mean*. Producing a final analysis can seem like an exercise in holding a singular meaning in stasis, in privileging one interpretation over many different possible readings.

From this perspective, research is serious because it is about intelligibility; research is about making sense. In the previous interlude I discussed research methods as techniques of seriousness, tools for manifesting a reality that can be referred to and establishing congruence between saying and meaning. In this final interstice I ask what happens if research resists making sense. I thus return to the first, in which I suggested that initially at least, my 'insider' position was a resource for doing research differently. Belonging to the group you research with does not inherently or automatically lead to methodological innovation, nor does unfamiliarity or distance necessarily involve objectification and alienation. While being an 'insider' can be a generative resource for a critical conversation with 'outsider' research (and vice versa) I'm increasingly uncertain about the value of such critical moves; 'all drawings of inside-outside boundaries in knowledge are theorized as power moves, not moves towards truth' (Haraway, 1988: 576). Having a taste of both complicates

flat or stereotypical renderings of researcher positionality, and provides the opportunity to engage with both locations and the relation between them.

I put this movement between 'inside' and 'outside' to use here, in discussion of non-/seriousness and research, and the development of a 'non-/serious manifesto'. I am curious about whether or not it is possible to produce non-/serious research. Chapter 6 demonstrated how skaters make claims for serious recognition at the same time as refuting the terms and drawing attention to the contingency of such an intelligibility, and Chapter 7 considers practices of fantasy, parody and irony as participants' engagements with the contingency of their social worlds. I wonder if, using non-/seriousness, research accounts might be able to make the same, or analogous, moves. This interlude is an attempt to do, or make, rather than developing a critique of 'serious research' and this follows Latour (2004) on gathering, Sedgwick (2003) on reparative reading and Cvetkovich (2012) on academic work as making, doing.

Spending time in the PhD talking and writing about avocados, prawns and pineapples, about unicorns, and about 'Mystery Ship' *feels right*. I think it might represent a way through the impasses that so characterized much of my research activity, a way to not be stuck as 'just a researcher'. If there is an essence of the league, this for me is it. Not the fishnets and/or athletic leggings, not the women-led environment, not the subversion of and conformity to normative femininity, not even the do-it-yourself collaboration and satisfaction of making something new. There is a gleefulness and joy in, for instance talking about eighties food on the radio, in laughing until your belly hurts about nothing at all.

I want to know if I can do with, for example, jokes about eighties food the same things as skaters do with them. That is to say, if in talking about these things I can draw attention to, and perhaps somewhat refuse or shift the boundaries of, the terms of what counts as serious research and the terms of intelligibility in sociological work. If the incident itself is about refusing (at the same time as seeking) serious recognition and intelligibility can research do this too? Can I put what I've learned from roller derby to use in my own research practice?

Just as skaters suggest making a film about 'traditional male sports' like amateur football but in the clichéd style of a typical roller derby documentary, thus transposing non-/seriousness from roller derby on to a broader gendered terrain of 'real, serious, sport' I wonder if I research about roller derby, or even *research in the style of roller derby*, is a way to trace and permeate the parameters of 'real, serious, research'. Using these jokes for research comes with a responsibility to continue what I think they are and what I think they do. If I posit avocado, prawn and pineapple as working to refute *and* claim intelligibility, then I want my use of them to do the same thing.

I think that taking such, verging on the nonsensical, moments and presenting them as part of my analysis, presenting at international conferences, and giving these jokes the same status as empirical material on, for example, gender equality in sports, can add to their power as well as detracting from it. I think the premise that the jokes we made in the park that day *matter* makes me look slightly ridiculous, and perhaps by extension draws attention to the more ridiculous elements in the business of academia more broadly. I think that taking roller derby seriously can imply not taking research seriously. I think standing up and talking about avocados, pineapples and prawns at the BSA, the ESA, the FWSA does justice to the league, I think it is an allegorical act. I am asking for recognition of my work as a serious piece of research at the same time as perhaps slightly interrupting the ease with which it is intelligible as serious sociology. Ideally this thesis would not only be *about* a joke, it would *be* a joke too.

It is in this context that I present the following 'Manifesto for Non-/serious Research':

MANIFESTO FOR NON-/SERIOUS RESEARCH

ONE

If research is to be non-/serious it must cease to be work. Specifically the relation between research means and research ends is to be reconfigured; research activity would become an end in itself.

TWO

If research is to be non-/serious it must be emotional and affective as much as rational-intellectual. Specifically the emotional work of research, and the feelings of all those involved, are no longer to be bracketed off, from either the process or product of research.

THREE

If research is to be non-/serious then it must always question, and often deny, any congruence between saying and meaning. Non-/serious research will relinquish its ability to necessarily or by default *say something about something.*

FOUR

If research is to be non-/serious then it must sometimes be unintelligible. Non-/serious research refuses legibility in the terms of 'serious' research, at the same time as claiming recognition within those same terms.

FIVE

If research is to be non-/serious then it is not disinterested in, but rather articulates and enacts a knowledge of the 'rules' of serious research. At the same time, non-/serious research articulates and enacts the knowledge that it is only a game, the 'rules' can change, and can be broken. Non-/serious research acknowledges the contingency of the context.

SIX

If research is to be non-/serious however, then it must be both interested in and indifferent to what is at stake in achieving serious recognition. Non-/serious research would be dubious of the value, for instance, of peer review, professorships, impact, funding, career and prestige.

For research to be non-/seriousness it would have to articulate an ambivalent unwillingness to meet the criteria of its own recognizability *as research.* Non-

/serious research would *somewhat* unravel itself, somewhat negate the conditions of its own legibility. While research is about making sense, about intelligibility, I think it might also be about the limits of our understandings, about uncertainty and not-knowing.

Conclusion: Sport for people who really, really like sport?

You know like the good old days when we had homemade t-shirts and things like that?

MB: Yeah!

I really embrace that and I really love that about our team and I think, I think its improved us as a team actually because we didn't focus ever on being professional, [laughing] or on looking professional! We just focused on enjoying the game and playing it and improving, [laughing] …I think we focused on the right thing, and that really we showed that it really doesn't matter what you look like you can be a really brilliant sportswoman on skates, so yeah I love that element of [league] and… I would just love forever if we could always be a little bit shambolic [both laughing]

MB: Me too…

I think it's just a sense of who [league] are, I really do

The Beefcake, individual interview, October 2010

The thesis began with the observation that both the league and participants' understandings of roller derby were changing. Writing the research has been accompanied by the frantic sensation of always being one step behind empirical actuality. At the time of writing participants were busy implementing their latest decision; to revoke the division of the league into 'competitive' and 'non-competitive' wings. The 'Rec League' is being re-integrated with 'intermediate' competitive skaters. In producing a sociological account of the renegotiation of what roller derby *is*, *could* or *should be*, both within the league itself and in interaction with a broader field of sport, there was a danger of prioritizing change at the expense of continuity as skaters put seriousness in to practice.

While the first half of the thesis (Chapters 4 & 5 in particular) turned on multiple and not always coherent distinctions between 'then' and 'now' in participants' talk, getting taken seriously in the league is, in a sense, about change and continuity in

combination, as the second half of the thesis (Chapter 6 & 7) demonstrated. Just as The Beefcake chuckled 'I would just love forever if we could always be a little bit shambolic', participants have faced not only the question of how to achieve serious recognition, but how to do so without the league, and roller derby more broadly as 'a sport for women who don't like sport', entirely or necessarily becoming what they were once defined in opposition to. Getting taken seriously raises questions of the meaning of seriousness in practice. The dilemma participants encountered is how roller derby might achieve recognition as a 'serious sport', without losing its distinctiveness as a DIY women's sport, without erasing itself in the process.

This final chapter discusses the principal research findings, and weaves together the arguments and conclusions of each chapter, in response to the research questions and towards a sociological account of seriousness. I then turn to the empirical and theoretical contributions and implications of the research, in relation to gender in women's sport, organizational change and the middle ground between structure and agency in human interaction. Subsequently, I return to the methodological trajectory of the research itself, and how my 'insider' position, once a central component of the research design, shifted and diminished. Finally, the research indicates a number of further questions and avenues for future research, particularly in terms of the relationship between seriousness and more established sociological concepts, and the possibility of re-thinking research methods through seriousness.

My argument is that a sociological analysis of seriousness in practice, of getting taken seriously both expands upon and unsettles established work with gender in sport, as well as familiar sociological preoccupations with for example, professionalization in 'alternative' sport. In foregrounding seriousness the thorough ambivalence with which participants negotiate the 'kinda subversive, kinda hegemonic' (Sedgwick, 1993: 15) terrain of women's sport is given center stage, as are movements back-and-forth, in-between polarities of structure and agency. As participants pursue roller derby's serious recognition and put seriousness in to practice they also navigate society's immanence, 'we are totally free to make society', and transcendence, 'we can do nothing against society's laws' (Latour 1993, 36). I developed the concept of non-/seriousness to analyze how participants

make claims for, and refuse, roller derby's recognition as a real, serious sport. Moreover, the research demonstrates the necessity of a sociology of seriousness, and of explorations of the methodological and political potential of research that does not always or necessarily take itself seriously.

8.1 Findings & Discussion

The research began with two assumptions, drawn from previous research: firstly that women's sport likely involves participants in negotiations of femininity and masculinity whereby 'subversion' and 'conformity' are often seen to co-occur, and secondly that gender theory presents particular difficulties for the empirical identification and differentiation of 'subversion' and 'conformity' (Breeze, 2010). Drawing on Sedgwick, the 'analysis of the pseudodichotomy between repression and liberation has led, in many cases to its conceptual reimposition' (2003: 12). Roller derby, by virtue of its DIY organization and very recent emergence in to a broader field of sport, was a particularly apt context from which to push against the boundaries of current scholarship. This is especially so given how participants' growing concerns with getting taken seriously pointed to how previous conceptualizations of seriousness were limited in scope and, particularly when it comes to empirical work, quality (Breeze, 2013b).

Prioritizing questions of gender subversion/conformity in women's negotiation of sport's 'contested ideological terrain' (Messner, 1988: 197) holds out the promise of substantial theoretical clout. Much crucial work has demonstrated the challenges that women athletes encounter and has traced the possibilities and limits of gender subversion in a variety of sports contexts. However, this thesis has suggested that such a body of work is much enhanced by an analysis of getting taken seriously in the unique women's sports context of roller derby. The research is thus a timely and necessary contribution to, and in intervention in, the burgeoning body of work that repeatedly concludes that gender in sport, and elsewhere, is *complex and contradictory*. The thesis as a whole was thus orientated towards two mid-level questions:

1. How is seriousness, and getting taken seriously, negotiated in practice?

2. In pursuit of serious recognition does the league become what it was initially defined in opposition to?

Getting taken seriously hinges on recognition, it is an interactional achievement pursued in participants' self-conscious and reflexive practices of organization and representation. Pursuit of serious recognition implies, but rarely explicitly raises, questions of how to *be* serious. Getting taken seriously is thus bound up with struggle for position, rationalized organization and bureaucratic administration, and with relations between 'saying' and 'meaning'. In practice however, participants' negotiations of serious recognition demonstrate how questions of seriousness cannot be subsumed to those of professionalization. I elaborate this central point below, considering the responses that the research has enabled, broken down according to the four, more precisely specified, subsidiary research questions.

Gender Subversion/Conformity

Firstly, *how does getting taken seriously relate to gender subversion/conformity?* The research addressed this question with a particular focus on participants' production and interpretation of gendered representations of roller derby, their league and themselves. As getting taken seriously increasingly came to infuse participants' concerns there was a shift away from, for example, those practices of dress previously interpreted in terms of gender subversion/conformity. For instance, fishnet tights and stocking were positioned by participants in the past as a naïve mistake, or dismissed via an association with those others who are 'rollergirls' rather than with themselves as 'athletes'. Branded sportswear and 'athletic leggings' came to predominate, especially among 'competitive' skaters. 'All-female' is removed from the league's posters, which are redesigned alongside logos and team shirts. Such self-representations are subject to something of a de-gendering; the most overt signifiers of normative or emphasized femininity are removed, with a view to becoming recognizably sporting and facilitating roller derby's intelligibility as a real, serious sport. In participants' narratives an oppositional or critical relation to 'sport' in general, especially located in opportunities for 'playing dress up' or 'wearing whatever you want', was disavowed.

Given such evidence it is tempting, but would be disingenuous, to conclude that *getting taken seriously* precludes opportunities for engagements with gender in women's sport. However, to do so would be to ignore how at the same time as seeking serious recognition, participants emphasized the importance of maintaining something of contemporary roller derby's uniqueness as a sport developed and run by and for *women*. Such tensions are well illustrated in the ambivalences participants express about men's roller derby participation. While men's roller derby brings with it potential increases in sporting legitimacy, participants fear a dilution or erasure of roller derby's distinctiveness as a specifically *women's* sport. This finding extends existing work that demonstrates how women's sport in general is articulated as illegitimate compared to men's and points to how getting taken seriously in a context where women's sport is a priori *not serious* requires a diversity of tactics, as participants work to maintain roller derby's autonomy *and* struggle for position in a broader field (Bourdieu, 1988, 1991, 1993).

This invites a second possible conclusion; instead of getting taken seriously *precluding* engagements with gender, getting taken seriously seems to imply a shift in the *kind* of engagements with gender that take place. From this perspective serious recognition appears to be accompanied by a move away from practices that have been celebrated as potentially disruptive of naturalized associations between *femininity/masculinity* and *women/men* (Carlson, 2010; Finley 2010; Hern 2010). Instead moving towards a perhaps more straightforward claim; that roller derby simply is 'sport', that women's sport is legitimate, and both should be recognized as such. These trajectories can be framed in terms of a shift away from 'radical' or 'queer' subversive aspirations to reconfigure the gendered meaning of 'sport' towards more 'liberal' strategies of arguing for women's inclusion in an otherwise 'male dominated' arena. These dynamics echo, for instance, findings that 'gay sports culture *either* promotes a liberal view of "inclusion" into mainstream sporting arenas, *or, alternatively,* challenges heterosexist definitions of sport' (Price & Parker, 2003: 109 emphasis added).

However, and perhaps unsurprisingly, I want to suggest that neither of these two interpretations, and in particular the dichotomous linearity upon which they rest, is

fully supported by the empirical material. Instead I want to argue for a third option, based on the crucial evidence discussed in Chapter 6, that as well as making roller derby intelligible as sport, participants also invert, transpose and refuse the gendered terms of serious recognition.

The problem participants faced is that their self-representation takes place in a context where the 'serious recognition' of women's sport more broadly is already problematized by the gendered dynamics of a broader field of sport. Seriousness, particularly in sport, is very much gendered. For instance Dilley & Scraton identify a gendered hierarchy of value in the definition of 'serious leisure' (Dilley & Scraton, 2010: 127, see also Grindstaff & West, 2010). This context means that presenting roller derby in serious, de-gendered, sports-like terms (e.g. by jettisoning fishnets) is insufficient for the achievement of serious recognition as long as roller derby continues to be played predominantly by women. It is in this context that participants laughed at themselves both as (gendered) 'rollergirls' and as (de-gendered) 'athletes', and at times refused to take either self-identification entirely seriously.

Moreover, when participants planned to make films about 'Ross in his office, typing away' rather than present roller derby in recognizably sport-like terms, instead they re-presented 'traditional male sport' in the stereotypically sensationally gendered grammar of representation more often reserved for roller derby. This serves as an example of a claim for roller derby's serious recognition that rather than hinging on the de-gendering of roller derby or its reformulation so as to be intelligible as 'sport' works in the opposite direction, inverting and drawing attention to a gendered double standard of seriousness in sport. Rather than roller derby being made recognizable as 'sport', in this instance, sport – 'traditional male sport' even – was made unrecognizable as 'sport'. Participants thus refused and reworked the gendered terms of serious recognition (e.g. by making nonsensical in-jokes about eighties food) at the same time as making claims for serious recognition (e.g. by calling out an interlocutor who played on the idea of roller derby as a sensationally gendered activity in which it is not surprising, after all, that women might bite each other).

The relation between getting taken seriously and gender subversion/conformity at first appears to be a case of serious recognition diminishing occasions for

engagement with the relations between femininity, masculinity and sport, in for instance, participants' style of dress. Upon second glance however, a more nuanced interpretation is possible; getting taken seriously brings with it a shift in the *kind* of engagements with gender that roller derby involves, towards a 'liberal' claim for recognition as legitimate sport. After a third pass however, it should be clear that neither of these options is precisely what I am getting at. In getting taken seriously participants de-gendered roller derby to make it more recognizable as 'sport', just as they exposed the gendered contingency of serious recognition, *and at the same time* as refusing straightforward intelligibility within the terms of such recognition. I further elaborate upon these dynamics below, in discussion of how participants distinguish between what is and is not conducive to serious recognition. I now turn to the second subsidiary research question, *how does getting taken seriously relate to organizational change?*

Organizational Change

The thesis responded to this question with a specific focus on participants' organization of competition, particularly in the formalization of DIY principles in the standardization of procedures for joining the league, the regulation of membership and the proliferation of policies for selecting skaters on to a team. 'Competition' comes to stand in for being serious about roller derby, and achieving serious recognition necessitated competitiveness; roller derby was made more legible as sport via league tables and rankings. Who belongs to the league and how was delineated according to competitiveness. Competition came to matter institutionally in ways it had not previously as bureaucratic regulations, such as attendance and skill level policies, delineated increasingly fine-grained distinctions between skaters. As the league divided itself into 'competitive' and 'non-competitive' wings, previously informal differences and hierarchies were formalized in organizational practice. Classifications of skater were bureaucratically regulated, codified in policy, and came to inform the allocation of shared resources; how much practice time each skater has access to. Serious recognition is thus bound up with struggle for resources within the league, and without as participants work together to secure external funding. While it remains possible to characterize the league's DIY organization as

'by the skaters, for the skaters', the 'skaters' referred to in this formulation are re-defined; 'skaters' becomes a more exclusive appellation, hinging on competitiveness.

Putting seriousness into organizational practice thus aligns with familiar sociological processes of, for instance, bureaucratization or the early stages of professionalization. Getting taken seriously from this perspective seems to be a case of participants reconfiguring roller derby so as to be commensurate with 'sport', a familiar trajectory that here includes the establishment and rationalization of distinct categories of skater; interest groups and status groups (Weber 1978). The organization of competition in pursuit of serious recognition accords with existing research on 'mainstreaming' or 'cooptation' with various forms of sport, particularly 'alternative' sport. More broadly, competition is central to Bourdieu's writing on professional sport, 'which can, of course, coexist with the appearances of amateurism' (1991: 366) and which encourages 'players and especially organizer to aim for victory at all costs' (ibid: 364). Seriousness in this sense appears as somewhat of a synonym for rationalization and the subordination of means to, bureaucratically regulated, ends, or 'the pursuit of maximum specific efficiency (measured in 'wins', 'titles', or 'records')' (ibid: 366). Roller derby thus shifts from a sports practice that is difficult to explain to others because of a lack of rankings, lack of organized competition, to an official sport with a UK governing body who in October 2013 have for the first time released national rankings, in a 'pivotal moment in UK Roller Derby history' (UKRDA, 2013: n/p). Of the 23 leagues eligible for ranking, the Edinburgh 'A' team ranks first.

Participants' accounts of shifts in league organization both romanticized and demonized the league's early organization. The present thus becomes either an inevitable response to the problems of the recent past *or* a decline from an original state, now corrupted. These dynamics are related in participants' reinterpretations of the beginnings of their league's DIY organization. Firstly the league's early days are positioned as endearingly and idyllically shambolic; non-hierarchical and friendly, a time when skating skill, if not completely irrelevant, took second place to the emphasis on having fun. Secondly, and at the same time, participants emphasize the problems and tensions of such early organizational forms, and the disputes that

clustered around team selection and leadership positions. Depending on interpretation, these were the halcyon days during which the league was 'open' and 'inclusive', 'anyone' could come along and join in, and/or joining the league was difficult and frightening because there was no procedure for integrating new members. This second form of re-telling articulates a need for better organization, where 'better' implies formal, routine procedure in order for team selection, the allocation of roles and division of labour to be 'fairer'.

I want to suggest that while competition can be something of a proxy for seriousness, both are productively understood as 'modes of ordering' (Law, 1994: 20) in that they 'construct problems and problem solutions' (ibid: 83) and generate relationships between 'what *is*… and what might or should be' (ibid: 111). Here we return to the unintended consequences of participants' organization of seriousness. In trying to find ways for the league to continue, for the 'fun' to go on, and in seeking 'fairer', 'more inclusive' approaches to membership, the organizational structures that participants created informed the possibilities and limits of their own future action, and changed what the league and roller derby were.

We can productively link the first two research questions at this point. That contemporary roller derby exists at all can be read as indicative of how, for mostly white, mostly middle-class, mostly able-bodied cis-gendered adult women living in urban centers, gender is something that can, within limits and in particular ways, be played with. Calling oneself 'Connie Lingus' and wearing fishnets to play a full-contact self-organized sport on roller skates does not, perhaps, turn many heads in a broader social landscape where gender politics, from gender quotas in parliamentary elections though gay marriage to trans* rights are increasingly visible. However, when roller derby becomes *organized*, and once getting taken seriously was a concern, the apparent voluntarism with which one can call oneself 'Connie Lingus' and wear fishnets become subject to unanticipated restraints.

In discussions of 'what it used to be like' or 'how weird it was back in the day' participants made sense of why roller derby had a problem with seriousness as they look back to a time when they didn't necessarily take roller derby, or themselves, seriously. Narratives of the league's beginnings are most often told in the same

moments as those about the present, and are mobilized both to justify and contest 'how things are now'. Getting taken seriously seems to have inculcated a reduction of the distinction between roller derby and 'sport'; roller derby is unequivocally, unambiguously 'just like any other normal sport'. At the same time, distinctions between 'then' and 'now' proliferated in participants' narratives and differences *between skaters* were formalized and put in to organizational practice.

The arguments from the first half of the thesis are, however, something of a set-up, tracing as they do more or less linear trajectories in which ambivalences were reduced in line with well-rehearsed processes of professionalization and bureaucratization. To conclude that in their pursuit of serious recognition skaters have simply shifted roller derby from a position of critical, gendered opposition and ambivalent difference from 'sport' to one of organized and recognizable similarity would be theoretically trite and empirically disingenuous. Such interpretations are only possible if we ignore 'athletic fags' and 'athletic snacks' alongside participants' inversions, transpositions and refusals of the gendered terms of serious recognition. As Bauman suggests 'the labour of classification' gives rise to 'more occasion for ambiguity' (1993: 3). In a similar vein Latour argues that 'purification' makes 'translation' and 'mediation' possible (1993: 12). The second half of the thesis was thus dedicated to troubling easy narratives of roller derby's entirely becoming 'sport for people who really, really like sport' and explored the proliferation of ambivalences alongside of their reduction.

Distinguishing Serious Recognition

The third subsidiary research question thus asked; *how do participants make distinctions between what is, and is not conducive to serious recognition?* Getting taken seriously appears to be a question of the reduction of distinctions between roller derby and 'sport', partly through the establishment and maintenance of differences within the league between skaters and between a more generalized conception of 'us', skaters who take roller derby seriously, and 'them', those outsiders who do not. However, distinctions between what is and is not conducive to serious recognition are made *indistinct* in participants' practice; the boundaries between what is and is not serious are ambivalent.

So while it is easy, for researcher and participant alike, to concentrate on maintaining a separation between what is, and is not, seriousness, in the service of a future in which roller derby is unequivocally recognized and recognizable as real, serious sport, 'taking seriously' and 'not taking seriously' begin to blur, and lose their distinctiveness. In practice they happen together. Distinctions between what is and is not serious sport, and what is and is not conducive to serious recognition are kept open, as participants repeatedly traverse, and move back and forth in-between:

1. Re-configuring what roller derby *is* and altering their self-representations so as to be recognizable as 'serious sport'.

2. Making representations, and articulating roller derby in ways that are difficult if not impossible to take entirely seriously, that somewhat refuse straightforward recognition as real, serious sport.

As participants grapple with what to call themselves, how to present themselves as people who play roller derby, not taking oneself seriously enables new identifications to be tried on, and later disavowed if necessary. Participants laugh at themselves as both 'rollergirls' and 'athletes'; not taking oneself seriously initially enables both these new identifications, and is part of movements towards taking oneself, and perhaps being taken, seriously. When participants eat 'athletic snacks' and smoke 'athletic fags' it is not necessarily, or only, a case of being unconcerned with serious recognition, these practices are part of working out *how* to be taken seriously, and how, and whether, to be serious.

In these instances it is not clear who or what is or is not being taken seriously, roller derby or the terms of serious recognition? Participants themselves or those others who would dismiss roller derby? While, for example in 'athletic fags', seemingly paradoxical positions are combined in practice (smoking cigarettes and athleticism, wanting to be taken seriously and not taking oneself seriously), I argue that *both* the re-presentation of roller derby as recognizably 'sport' *and* refusals of such recognition are locally coherent responses to the problem of not being taken seriously in the first place.

Participants laugh as they enact roller derby in ways that are deliberately very difficult to recognize as sport, making claims for recognition at the same time as disrupting the terms of such intelligibility. I want to suggest that it is in such movement between two seemingly paradoxical or oppositional positions that participants find a way through, and pursue serious recognition without the league *entirely* becoming what it was initially defined in opposition to. I developed the concept of 'non-/seriousness' to refer to this attitude and this doubled, and ambivalent practice of claiming recognition, demanding to be taken seriously, at the same time as refusing to take the terms of that recognition seriously, negating the imperative to *be* serious.

Non-/seriousness is what enables skaters to try on new identities without being held accountable. 'Athletic fags', 'athletic snacks', 'Ross in his office...' and jokes about eighties food are non-/serious. Unicorns and power animals, and to a lesser extent derby names and derby wives are non-/serious. Non-/seriousness facilitates, and is a manifestation of, participants' continued ambivalence in relation to their changing identities, practices, representations and organization. Just as Latour's broken fetishes create 'the independent world of practice, and allows it to unfold without ever having to justify itself on the spot.' (2010: 32). When skaters laugh at themselves as 'rollergirls' *and* as 'athletes' they are safe, because they are not taking these new identities seriously the power of the labels is diminished. 'Thanks to the broken idols it is possible to innovate without taking any risks, without accepting any responsibility being exposed to any danger' (ibid). When participants encounter interlocutors, mediators like the radio host, to whom questions about eighties food and about the sexist dismissal of roller derby are *equally unintelligible*, skaters mobilize their own non-/seriousness to dismiss his, and others', withholding of recognition. These 'others' are not in on the joke. Thus, working towards serious recognition is an exercise in establishing and negotiating a set of related distinctions, between who can legitimately say what roller derby is and which views and interpretations can be legitimately challenged.

The empirical examples discussed throughout the thesis were selected to illustrate how participants make their way through the ambivalent impasse of sport for women

who don't like sport (where 'we' are absolutely free to make and re-make sport, roller derby and the league) towards the certainty of roller derby for people who really, really like sport ('we' can do nothing against the 'laws' of sport). I want to suggest however that dynamics of non-/seriousness are not confined to these examples, rather the league and roller derby more broadly are characterized by non-/seriousness. Roller derby is, in a way, a joke about sport and about gender. Participants make a joke of roller derby's lack of serious recognition, and in doing so make the claim for such recognition, seek to be taken seriously and hold on to a refutation of the terms of such recognition. To be non-/serious is to inhabit the middle-ground and move between extremes of absolute voluntarism and absolute determinism.

Making the League

With this in mind I now turn to the final subsidiary question; *how do participants continue to* make *their league, roller derby and sport more broadly, just as in turn their league and roller derby become established as institutions and, alongside 'sport', inform the possibilities and limits of their action?* There is a sense of inevitability in participants' accounts of the changing nature of roller derby, and of their league's organization. Key moments (first bout, deciding to be competitive…) became fateful in participants' re-tellings. However, I am not proposing 'seriousness' as a determining structure, far from it. The value of competition, for instance, has been subject to explicit deliberation and debate, is frequently questioned and continually re-enacted. While roller derby and the league might appear to have become what they were initially defined in opposition to, participants continue to interrupt and complicate such a process even as it unfolds.

I have interpreted further examples of practices that are *almost* 'impossible' to take seriously, practices of non-/seriousness, in terms of fantasy, parody and irony. Fantasy, parody and irony share in common a status of being obviously 'made-up', and of troubling any assumed congruence between what participants *say* and what they *mean*. Practices of fantasy, parody and irony are all, in a way, about making jokes; participants suspect that those not involved in the league consider roller derby to be something of a joke, 'a big sexy joke', and in response turn this dynamic itself

in to a joke; it becomes the subject of laughter, ridicule and dismissal, it is not taken seriously. It is through such playful intervention in the relation between meaning and saying that participants move between the possibilities and limits of getting taken seriously, and work to find a way through the impasse of being made, constrained even, by structures that are at one and the same time, the outcomes of participants own reflexive, deliberate, collective action.

Such laughter can be interpreted as a mechanism for holding the league together; the humour of derby names and power animals becomes a form of solidarity in the face of increasingly fine-grained and institutionalized distinctions between status and interest groups in the league. However not everyone laughs, and while such jokes can be read as defining the boundaries of the league, and as bonding its members together, solidarity through this humour is not equally distributed, but rather runs along the lines of informal hierarchies between 'old' and 'new' members, and reinstates formal differences between, for instance, 'competitive' and 'non-competitive' skaters.

However, non-human forms of representation, power animals and unicorns in particular, are ways for (some) participants to carry on having fun; a way to continue to do what is no longer the primary or institutionally encoded end goal of playing roller derby. Practices of fantasy, parody and irony are a way to intervene in, and re-enact the 'origin myths' of roller derby and the league. In having fun with these nonsensical self-representations participants walk the line between romanticizing their short history as idyllic and denigrating it as naïve. In the first option a sense of what has been lost, fun, is read as a necessary sacrifice in pursuit of roller derby being-and-becoming a real, serious sport. In the second, a sense that 'we' know better now, is read as indicative of mistakes made before it became obvious that roller derby is, or should be treated as, a real, serious sport. Derby names, derby wives, power animals and unicorns are a hangover from the league's short past, and are a way for participants to make sense of change while recognizing what has been both lost *and* gained. Non-/seriousness is an effect of, and enables, change and continuity together in combination, facilitating shifts in what roller derby is and who the league is for, and lending support for what is, or was, to continue.

Non-/seriousness is a way to conjoin what it otherwise kept distinct, taking and not taking seriously at the same time, voluntarism and determinism. Through a combination of fantasy, parody and irony participants revel in the evidently made-up character of their league and roller derby, and make a number of statements, each of which builds upon the other and plays upon the tensions therein. Articulating roller derby as somewhat fantastical enables participants to present roller derby itself as (1) 'only a joke'; it doesn't matter that it is not taken seriously and they can therefore, innovate safely, without taking any risks. In taking on derby names, and derby wives, participants parody names and wives 'in the real world', and perhaps 'sport' in the real world too, this enables participants to 'say'; (2) 'but it is *all* only a joke'; serious sport, and perhaps gender too, are laughable, and subject to reconfiguration. Finally, in ironic gestures, sometimes involving unicorns and other non-human self-representations, participants combine the first two statements and add that despite all this, (3) 'it still matters'. If roller derby continues to be perceived as a 'just a big sexy joke', then the joke is that it is not a joke; the joke is intended to be taken seriously.

Practices of non-/seriousness intervene in, refuse a straightforward relationship between saying and meaning and are thus one way that participants move between a position where it doesn't matter that roller derby is not taken seriously, and the active pursuit of serious recognition. Non-/seriousness is a resource for participants as they take steps towards roller derby's serious recognition whilst striving for the autonomy to self-define their sports practice.

The questions that this thesis has responded to can be understood as versions of those 'big questions' that are almost as old as sociology itself. For instance, Graeber proposes that 'Marx's theory of value was above all a way of asking the following question: assuming that we do collectively make our world, that we collectively remake it daily, then how is it that we somehow end up creating a world that few of us particularly like, most find unjust, and over which no one feels they have any ultimate control?' (2013: 222). While Marxism thoroughly expounded upon relations

between divisions of labour and socio-economic hierarchy, much of sociology since has concerned itself with the study of unintended consequences of intentional action, often with a view to discovering which of such consequences might be avoidable. It has been my intention to engage with, and in doing so, perhaps re-phrase, such meta theoretical questions by placing them side by side with the rather small hill of beans that is contemporary women's roller derby and the claim that 'seriousness' requires sustained sociological attention. Non-/seriousness is one resource that participants draw on to engage with, and intervene in, the unintended consequences of their collective action. With this in mind I now turn to the broader contributions the research has made, and the implications of its findings.

8.2 Contributions & Implications

Like the simultaneous offensive and defensive strategy their sport demands participants seek serious recognition at the same time as troubling and somewhat refusing the terms of such recognition, and do so in practices that I have analyzed as non-/serious. Analysis of participants' negotiations of getting taken seriously demonstrates that broader questions of both gender and organization are at stake in a sociology of seriousness, as are understandings of the relations between voluntarism and determinism in the possibilities and limits of reflexive, deliberate collective action. Furthermore, while the research focus developed alongside participants' growing concerns with seriousness, research methods and methodology can be productively re-thought in terms of getting taken seriously. The thesis has thus made several contributions to, and has a diverse collection of implications for, broader sociological concerns. I consider these below divided according to three strands that in practice are interwoven; empirical, theoretical and methodological.

Empirical

The research has contributed a rigorous and original ethnographic account of a novel women's sports context. Existing sociological accounts of roller derby have predominantly repeated the patterns of a broader literature on sport and gender and prioritized questions of subversion/conformity. The research focus on seriousness thus both contributes to, and troubles, these existing bodies of work by opening new

doors for understanding the situated and diverse ways that women negotiate the treacherously gendered terrain of sport. Moreover, an empirical emphasis on getting taken seriously has responded to something of a gap in sociological literature, in which recourse to 'seriousness' often remains unexamined. Concurrently, the research has led directly to critical engagement with previous conceptualizations of seriousness in leisure studies, particularly in the 'Serious Leisure Perspective' (SLP) (Stebbins, 1982, 2011). Analyzing seriousness in practice demonstrates how the SLP's overly descriptive and a-social operationalization of 'seriousness' limits the perspective's theoretical scope (Breeze, 2013b). The research shows that seriousness, rather than a simple description of some forms of leisure, is generative of, and generated in, practice and thus amenable to, and requiring of, a sociological analysis (ibid).

Analyzing seriousness in practice indicates how this concept sits at the intersection of well-established sociological concerns. In pursuit of serious recognition research participants re-tread paths that have been described as co-optation or mainstreaming in various 'alternative' sports contexts. Getting taken seriously is centrally bound up with participants' struggle for roller derby's position in a broader field. Indeed I suspect that much of this thesis could be re-written in almost entirely Bourdieusian, or Weberian, terms. To do so however would be an exercise in applying established theory, theoretical orthodoxy even, to a novel empirical context, which at best would restrict the impact of the research to, perhaps, making minor suggestions for the elaboration and/or refinement of such theory.

Instead, a sustained and committedly situated exploration of seriousness as defined, enacted and negotiated by participants synthesizes and moves beyond each of these traditions. Following threads of seriousness through participants' representational and organizational practice highlights sublime ambivalences at the crux of what it means to be taken seriously. Getting taken seriously is a question of the tensions, compromises and unlikely combinations that occur in middle-ranges of agency, as participants' amalgamate their desires for and refusals of roller derby's intelligibility as a real, serious sport.

The research thus has implications for a range of research agendas. Particularly contexts where gender contestation coincides with organizational practice, such as the way we make sense of gender disparities in sports management and leadership positions. More broadly too, for instance in the pursuit of gender justice through institutional or routinized action, from affirmative action in parliamentary gender quotas to gender mainstreaming in EU policy discourse, the ambivalences potentially located in the 'seriousness' of such practices has the capacity to disrupt, and expand, our understandings. Similarly, the relations between media representations of women athletes, indeed of women in general, and gender identity, binary discourses of gender, heteronormativity and gender oppression is a vast field of inquiry within and beyond gender sociology. The research points to how an analysis of seriousness, and particularly the deployment of notions of non-/seriousness to focus on relations between meaning and saying could be put to use in such contexts.

Recourse to seriousness is common in institutional and academic everyday life. Calls to 'be serious' about X, to take Y seriously, and conversely, the dismissal of people, propositions and positions as insufficiently serious are at once all but empty and powerfully normative. By looking at seriousness in practice, specifically how participants define, enact and contest its meaning in pursuit of serious recognition the generative implications of calls for seriousness are bought to light. It is my hope that after making their way through the pages of this thesis readers are more alert to their own encounters with 'seriousness' and perhaps are more reflexive about, if not skeptical of, calls to be serious or to take seriously.

Theoretical

The research's theoretical contributions and implications turn on the conceptual development of non-/seriousness as one analytical attempt to avoid the reification of pseudodichotomies (Sedgwick, 2003: 12) between determinism/voluntarism, structure/agency and repression/liberation. Non-/seriousness foregrounds, and begins with, the thorough ambivalence that runs through the existing bodies of work that contextualize this research.

The problem is both grand and intractable and has been iterated countless notable times (Durkheim, 1897; Foucault, 1980; Giddens, 1986; Hobbes, 1651; Latour, 1993). Expressed variously in how 'the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living' (Marx, 1852: n/p), in 'iron cages' and/or 'a shell as hard as steel' (Weber, 1930, see also Baehr, 2001) these tensions especially infuse Butler's (1990; 1993; 1997a; 1997b; 2005) theorizing of the constitution of the self. For example in *The Psychic Life of Power* Butler considers 'a willingness to turn back on ourselves' (1997b: 129) where:

> …attaining *recognizable* being requires self-negation, requires existing as a self-negating being in order to attain and preserve a status as "being" at all (ibid: 129-130 emphasis added)

I posit that non-/seriousness is one theoretical tool for inhabiting such Gordian knots, not to cut through them, as is certainly possible with recourse to urgent political issues and clarity of expression alike (Nussbaum, 1999), but rather to move in-between the small spaces of such a knot; the crevices, cracks and pores of its bounds, no matter how tight or intricate.

I am not proposing non-/seriousness as a wholesale solution to the question of the relationship between structure and agency in social action, rather I think it is more of a way to ever so slightly shift the question, to a focus on possibilities for understanding that does not rely on binary categories of thought. In this way non-/seriousness takes its genesis from Mol's development and use of noncoherence, as opposed to *in-* or *un-*coherence, and multiplicity as 'more than one – but less than many' (2002: 55 see also Law, 2002: 130; 2003b). Non-/seriousness is one analytical attempt to move away from 'psuedodichotomies' and to work on the possibility of analyses that do not reify the binaries that they seek to understand.

Throughout the research I repeatedly bumped up against the stubborn problem of how much of what we do *could be otherwise*; the thorough-going contingency of social life. Of course, the problem resides in how of course 'it could be otherwise', but why is it not? I find Graeber's (2013) recent work on value useful for thinking here. Drawing on Marx, Weber and Bourdieu in equal measure, Graeber contends that it is not a question of falsely-conscious 'belief', in the necessity or inevitability

of any particular way of organizing or acting in social life, but instead of how once individuals and groups have a stake, or an interest, in the realization of certain values then the contingency of the conditions in which such values are defined and pursued becomes entirely extraneous:

> They may propose a total view of the world, but it's not particularly important if the actors believe that this view is in any ultimate sense true, valid, or correct, as long as they are committed to the achievement of certain forms of value (which, again, can only be realized in others' eyes). That is, value systems lead to the naturalization of arbitrary ideologies but not because they convince the actors that certain things are inevitable, or written into the fundamental structure of reality, or even that they necessarily "go without saying," but rather, because all these questions of ultimate reality are simply irrelevant. (2013: 222)

Significantly, Graeber uses both games and narratives to illustrate his argument, for instance, 'if one is enjoying the bedtime story, one doesn't care that penguins can't really talk' (ibid: 230). I think that if seriousness, getting taken seriously is a value that participants are 'committed to the achievement of' and which leads to 'the naturalization of arbitrary ideologies' in, for instance, de-gendering representation, instituting competition and bureaucratically regulating distinctions between skaters, *then it is in non-/seriousness that participants manifest their awareness of the contingency and arbitrariness of the context/structures/world in which they act.* Non-/seriousness is not the opposite of seriousness. Non-/seriousness enables the pursuit of value – serious recognition – simultaneous with the demonstration of a lack of belief, or skepticism, in any ultimate or inevitable basis for the way in which that value is defined, achieved or bestowed.

Of course, this theoretical discussion has a very 'serious' tone. By contrast, one implication of the research is for the potential of theory that does not take itself too seriously. Recent years have seen the development of 'low theory' (Halberstam, 2011) and the pursuit of 'big questions' in, for instance, animated films for children such as *Kung Fu Panda* (Zizek, 2009), which in a way make a point of taking seriously, theoretically, that which might be otherwise dismissed as trivial or irrelevant. I want to argue, in a different direction, for more room for humility and

uncertainty in theoretical practice, more space for hesitancy and not-knowing; both as a resource for finding out (Cvetkovich, 2012) and as ends in themselves.

The concept of non-/seriousness has developed out of the specificity of the research context itself, and I absolutely do not intend it as a catch-all concept with limitless possibilities for application. The limits of non-/seriousness are perhaps most stark when it comes to 'serious' areas of contemporary research in social and political science. Climate change, drone strikes, UN interventions, immigration, benefit reform; in a list of unquestionably urgent, important and solemn issues facing the world today it is hard to see the relevance of non-/seriousness. What the research does point to however, is the importance of asking firstly, what is at stake in the way that 'seriousness' is defined and put to use, for instance, in research funding and priorities, and secondly, what are the effects of pursuing serious recognition in theoretical, and academic work more broadly.

Non-/seriousness would be most aptly put to use in analyzing empirical contexts that involve organization and representation, and in theoretical work orientated towards similar issues; questions of semiotics, values, norms and interests. Non-/seriousness also implicates questions of epistemology in social science; I now turn to a consideration of the research's methodological contributions and implications.

Methodological

The research, in both form and content, turned out very differently from my original expectations. A focus on seriousness arose in response to the empirical context itself, as participants' concerns with getting taken seriously became too big to ignore. In one sense this is the location of the research's rigor, my initial involvement in roller derby enabled a sensitivity and alertness to these changes that might not have been possible otherwise. Had it not been for my involvement in the league since its very beginnings, it is very likely that an initial focus entirely on femininity, masculinity and gender subversion/conformity would have continued to characterize the research in its entirety, as originally planned. At the same time, over the course of the research my own relationship to roller derby was subject to just as much flux as the league itself.

In the introduction I talk of my growing excitement at a 'shambolic' meeting in the back room of a bar in early 2008, with 16 women, as the possibility of starting a roller derby league in Edinburgh seemed to materialize before our eyes. Only one skater from that initial meeting, Irene Brew, remains active within the league, and over the years around half of the research participants have eventually left the league, relocating for work, travelling, leaving due to on-going injuries or simply deciding that roller derby wasn't for them after all. Indeed, the 'retention rate' of newer skaters was a subject of league policy, and the establishment of the Fresh Meat programme was undertaken explicitly in an attempt to encourage more new skaters to stay on with the league. Writing now, it is eighteen months since I left the league.

The methodological opportunities and challenges of the research have thus clustered around the movement from 'insider' to 'outsider', with an awareness that the use of these labels implies an absoluteness that is not born out in actuality. In my shifting degrees of belonging to the league the task became one of mediating between closeness and distance, trying to synthesize something of both positions and negotiating the twin imperatives of 'doing it right' and actually just 'doing it'. Prioritizing getting taken seriously and all its implications may not have been possible had it not been for my increasing distance from the league and ability to engage with these processes as someone who had less of a personal stake in them; by the time the distinction between 'competitive' and 'non-competitive' skaters was instated, I was no longer skating, no longer designated by either label.

The thesis' interludes gave an account of these processes, and demonstrated how such movement between 'inside' and 'outside' problematizes simplistic understandings of both. The interludes were where a focus on seriousness invited the realization that doing research and producing a doctoral thesis can also be understood in terms of 'getting taken seriously'. Looking back now, it is possible to claim that the research methodology emerged around questions of seriousness, and implied asking both, *what is the relationship between seriousness and research?* And *is non-/serious research possible?*

Research can be understood in terms of seriousness in three overlapping ways: firstly because it is professional work, an activity with rationalized ends and means;

secondly because research is, for the most part and despite exceptions, thought of, talked about and enacted as if it were rational-intellectual, rather than affective-emotional; and thirdly research can be thought of as serious because it usually involves some form of assumption about congruence between saying and meaning. Doing research assumes the ability to say something *about something.* From this perspective research methods can be thought of as tools or techniques in pursuit of seriousness, via enabling both claims to validity and the specification of how research can be legitimately questioned and contested. This tripartite relation between research and seriousness is not necessarily definitive or generalizable, it is intended rather as a starting point for broader debate.

The possibility of non-/serious research is more difficult. For research to be non-/seriousness it would have to articulate an, albeit ambivalent, unwillingness to entirely or consistently meet the criteria of its own recognizability *as research.* Non-/serious research would *somewhat* unravel itself, somewhat negate the conditions of its own legibility. Non-/serious research would laugh at itself, laugh at the arrogance of the assumption that it is possible to say anything about anything, but crucially it would carry on pursuing that possibility in the same breath as denying it. Non-/seriousness in research means remaining painfully yet playfully alert to the absurdity of the whole endeavor, and carrying on, not necessarily regardless, but acting in the knowledge of that absurdity.

Again, I am not proposing non-/seriousness as a catch-all magical solution to the perennial problems of representation, and of producing sociological accounts. Rather non-/seriousness is but one, perhaps quite unfeasible, response to this situation. There are links here of course to the avenues that others have proposed as a way out, way through or way between such impasses. I have in mind in particular the body of work that clusters around 'matters of concern' and 'gathering' (Latour, 2004; Law, 2004; Stengers, 2011) as epistemological moves away from the de-bunking mode of 'modern critique' (Latour, 2004) as well as Sedgwick's discussion of 'paranoid' and 'reparative' reading (2003: 150). Modern critique, de-bunking, is serious for two reasons. Firstly, modern critique assumes the possibility of correspondence between reality and, some kinds of, representation. Secondly and relatedly because the de-

bunking action of modern-critique stops short when it comes to the 'rules of the game' itself. A non-/serious epistemology, in contrast, prioritizes questions, and refusals, of the terms of its own intelligibility.

The appropriateness of methodological allegory is again at the fore here. Allegory 'makes space for ambivalence and ambiguity. In allegory, the realities made manifest do not necessarily have to fit together… it is to hold two or more things together that do not necessarily cohere' (Law, 2004: 90). The thesis has thus contributed one development of Law's call for methodological allegory, in tracing the connections between changes in the research's empirical focus and methodological character, between its form and substance and between its substantive and epistemological concerns.

In his presidential address at the British Sociological Association's (BSA) annual conference in 2013, and in the context of his, and others' broader work on public sociology (Burawoy, 2005; Holmwood, 2007; 2011) John Holmwood called for the full recognition and conceptualization of sociology as a specifically *professional* practice. Especially when situated in relation to recent high-profile critiques of sociology, for instance Aditya Chakrabortty's (2012) *Guardian* article lambasting sociology in general and the BSA in particular for an apparent lack of research dealing with the causes of the global financial crisis, Holmwood's recourse to professionalization and the BSA's broader engagement with Chakrabortty (BSA, 2012) begins to sound a lot like a call for the recognition of sociology's seriousness.

Sociology can thus be understood as having a problem, with some 'others' who do not necessarily take it seriously as a discipline, as a body of knowledge. Holmwood is concerned with the 'legitimacy of sociology as a professional practice' (2007: 46). Sociology faces versions of the same questions that research participants have encountered, how to be taken seriously without erasing itself and without losing its distinctive character. It is clear that a sociology of seriousness enables thinking about a range of issues in sociological practice as well as in the contexts towards which sociological attention is so often directed, in a new light.

8.3 New Questions & Future Research

Seriousness came to interest me personally and sociologically by virtue of its ubiquity in everyday talk and of the political potential of non-/seriousness. It is here too that there is the greatest possibility for further research.

While the research is limited in its scope to just one roller derby league in Scotland, participants make sense of roller derby's past, present and future on a wider spectrum, referring to its previous incarnations, ('we're not hamming it up, like they used to'), and other sports ('football teams have managers'). Looking through *Lead Jammer Magazine*[8] in 2011 with Pauline Baynes, we pick out the features on new leagues in the UK, 'you can tell they're new' Pauline says, pointing to photographs, because of the way they're all wearing face-paints and heavy make-up; the featured skaters all have their faces painted like skulls. With my data I cannot answer the question of whether all leagues and their members follow the same trajectories as those I describe here, but I can speculate that given the conditions of roller derby's emergence in the UK, most women's leagues will have encountered similar issues and challenges. Further research on the differences and similarities in the ways that differently located roller derby leagues respond to these issues would be important contributions to sociological conversations about seriousness in practice, and non-/seriousness as analytical device. Similarly, a comparison between seriousness and non-/seriousness in women's and in men's roller derby would productively expand the debate.

Analyses of seriousness and non-/seriousness in a range of women's and LGBTQ sports contexts, and particularly sports practices (e.g. cheerleading, synchronized swimming, pole, parkour, softball, ultimate Frisbee, korfball, kibaddi) that somewhat trouble dominant sporting values by for instance prioritizing co-operation over competition, would also potentially expand and/or contest the analysis presented here. By the same token, explorations of seriousness in other forms of DIY

[8] Authored, published and distributed by skaters in the UK.

organization and DIY culture, from riot grrrrl through to craft movements, might ascertain and further delineate the relationship between seriousness, gender and self-organization by asking to what extent is seriousness and serious recognition even on the agenda in comparable empirical contexts.

Speaking more generally still, perhaps one of the most salient areas for future research on seriousness, and particularly on non-/seriousness, is in various locations of cultural production, specifically the 'art world'. Delivering the BBC Reith Lectures, artist Grayson Perry describes how, after winning the 2003 Turner Prize a journalist asked him 'are you a lovable character or a serious artist?'. He responded 'can't I be both?' (Perry, 2013: 9). In his first lecture, 'Democracy has Bad Taste', Perry goes on to suggest that when it comes to the question of *what is art*, 'what it boils down to is seriousness' (ibid). Of course, questions of intelligibility are well rehearsed in this context. Both Perry and Sarah Thornton point to how unintelligibility, or 'unreadability' (Perry, 2013: 9; Thornton 2008: 148) is a common strategy for establishing and maintaining an autonomous position in a broader field.

Indeed, the research points to analyzing seriousness in various contexts of unintelligibility, from 'International Art English' (Rule & Levine, 2012), through the 'Sokal hoax' (Sokal, 1996, see also Callon 1999) in which a Alan Sokal, a physicist, successfully published an article, parodying deconstructivist cultural studies in the journal *Social Text,* to Bourdieu's 'justification of his own notoriously difficult prose style as a tactic for defending the integrity of the intellectual field against incursions from the economic or political ones' (Graeber, 2013: 228). The political potential of unrecognizability is well established, for instance in Scott's demonstration of how 'illegibility, then, has been and remains, a reliable source for political autonomy' (Scott 1998: 54) and similarly in how, 'many activists seek political visibility, but there are more things you can do when the people in power don't have the capacity to recognize your existence' (Cooper, 2012: n/p). In this context, the thesis points to the potential of non-/seriousness illegibility in a variety of *social,* as well as political, contexts.

Additionally, explorations of non-/seriousness in contexts of organizational change in general, and professionalization in various locations could productively expand the debate. Specifically, as eluded to earlier, explorations of non-/seriousness in contexts of higher education are a potentially very apt area of further inquiry, which could prioritize three areas; academic culture, social science methodology and the allocation of material resources and the division of labour. Each of these areas offers the opportunity to elaborate upon the political potential of non-/seriousness, and moreover, to explore how seriousness inflects access to economic, as well as symbolic and cultural, capital.

Future research might also undertake the conceptual task of delineating the precise relations between non-/seriousness and a range of overlapping and well-established sociological concepts. For instance, the connections between non-/seriousness and rationality, legitimacy, authority, cultural and symbolic capital, the presentation of self in everyday life and social solidarity could be productively traced in both empirical and exclusively theoretical work. While I have argued for the unique contribution of a sociology of seriousness and analyses of non-/seriousness there are evidently areas of overlap with established theoretical tools, the mapping of which would potentially enhance both the scope and precision of each conceptual scheme.

Finally, the ethnic and class locations of research participants have been a somewhat silent but constant companion to the analytical work of this thesis. While seriousness demonstrably inflects and is refracted by gender, participants' whiteness and predominantly middle-class status have remained relatively unexamined. The relations between seriousness and multiple axes of identity, as well as intersecting forms of inequality are key sites for further enquiry. An intersectional analysis might consider how the cynical distance involved in non-/seriousness as it enables new identities, organizational and representational forms, meanings and relationships is an effect of relative privilege, or how the ability to enact non-/seriousness is a manifestation of economic, ethnic and embodied privilege.

Final Remarks

This thesis bears testimony to the dilemma of being taken seriously, in its pursuit of intelligibility and recognition as a piece of 'serious' sociological research. In 2008 I fell in love with roller derby for what I saw as the opportunities it offered for women working together to make something relatively new, and for the combination of speed, power, aggression, camaraderie and yes, silly names and fishnet tights that playing roller derby then entailed. I was 23 when I started playing roller derby and I'm pushing 30 now, and I don't think I would have dedicated so much time and so much energy to this ridiculous sport if I hadn't seen in it a real challenge, both to 'sport' and to conservative ideologies of femininity. Five and a half years later I do still love roller derby, but now more than ever I love it for its noncoherences, for its non-sense and for the self-conscious humour that I still see as pervading even its most serious moments, that as this thesis has demonstrated represent interventions in both 'gender' and 'sport' otherwise absent from the literature.

While the research, of course, is an exercise in making sense of some of the non-sense, my hope is that it has done so, whilst conveying, preserving and perhaps also adding to the absurdity of it all. Whilst participants fume at the injustice of broader conceptions of roller derby as 'just a big sexy joke' and while I contend that, in a way, roller derby itself *is* a joke about sport and about gender; the joke is that it is not a joke, that it is intended to be taken seriously. Like so many jokes, and like allegory, roller derby turns on the pervasive multiplicity of meaning and on the proliferation of possible miss-interpretations. Writing a thesis is in part about telling a story, and telling a story is very similar to telling a joke; setting the scene and delivering the punch-line. I don't think it is possible to overstate the centrality of how the ambivalence so crucial in roller derby, that brings with it the possibility of refusing both one's own solidity and the solidity of the context in which all of this unfolds, is not a lack, but a resource.

While thinking about sport and seriousness I am often reminded of the infamous expression attributed to Bill Shankly and often mis-quoted as 'some people believe football is a matter of life and death, I am very disappointed with that attitude. I can assure you it is much, much more important than that' I do not think that such a

configuration of seriousness and sport stands up in the context of roller derby. My experience of roller derby is more akin to Oscar Wilde's (1892) 'life is far too important a thing to ever talk seriously about it'. Even more than this roller derby is an exemplary instance of the reaching for the possibility of arguing, and acting, outwith, but in relation to, the terms of the debate.

Appendix

Appendix i Breeze, M (2014 – forthcoming) PROOF

Breeze, M (2014 – forthcoming) **'**Sport for women who don't like sport'? Roller Derby and Sporting Legitimacy, article accepted for *Cultural Studies* special issue on 'Gender and Subcultures'

ABSTRACT

Contemporary roller derby is a full-contact team sport played on roller skates, practiced in the United Kingdom since 2006. Roller derby is a new and emergent sport, is played predominantly by women, and is run on a do-it-yourself (DIY) model. Drawing on four years of ethnographic work with one roller derby league this article begins with the observation that roller derby takes place in an ambivalent relation to a broader cultural field of sport. Roller derby has often been understood, by skaters and academics alike, as occupying a position of gendered alterity in relation to more established sports practices. Such a relational position is changing however, as participants shift from defining roller derby as 'like sport for women who don't like sport' to it being 'for people who really, really like sport'. Roller derby appears to move along familiar trajectories of institutionalization, skaters are increasingly preoccupied with its recognition as 'real, legitimate serious sport' and can *seem* less concerned with any subversive, feminist or political potential of their sports practice. This paper gives an account of these movements, traces manifestations and disavowals of roller derby as 'sport for women who don't like sport' and foregrounds participants' ambivalent feminisms and feminist ambivalences. The paper asks how the specifically gendered character of roller derby's relation to a broader field of sport might shift as skaters become more interested in sporting legitimacy. In doing so I draw out theoretical implications for the way that different forms of feminist thought and action are typically conceptualized as separate or distinct, and argue for the simultaneity and co-occurrence in practice of a diversity of feminist tactics.

Key words: Roller Derby, Gender, Feminism, Ambivalence, Sport.

INTRODUCTION

Sport has long been hailed as a location par excellence for the contestation and preservation of 'the gender order', in both related senses of systematic inequality between women and men, and in discourses of binary gender difference (Birell 1984; Bridel & Rail 2007; Bryson 1990; Connell 1990; Grindstaff & West 2006; Hall 1984; Harris & Clayton 2007; Light & Kirk 2000; McKay et al. 2009; Messner 1988; Price & Parker 2003; Shakib & Dunbar 2002). Over the past four decades women's sport in particular has garnered much attention from sociologists of sport and gender and feminist scholars (Bernstein 2002; Birell & Richter 1987; Theberge 1993, 1997, 1998, 2000; Hargreaves 1986, 1997; Jefferson Lenskyj 1998; Wheaton & Thomlinson 1998; Wright & Clarke 1999). Interpretations of the cultural meanings of women in sport have shifted from women athletes being 'almost an oxymoron' (Kimmel 2000:xiii) to their celebration as feminist cultural icons (Heywood & Dworkin 2003), both of which entail research foci on questions of the feminist or political potential of women's sport, and the possibilities for gender subversion in a variety of sports contexts.

Existing research with women's sport and leisure has prioritized these questions and issues in three overlappy approaches; (i) by exploring empowerment in women-only sports contexts (Birrell & Richter 1987; Varpolotai 1987); (ii) by analyzing women's participation in public institutions otherwise dominated by men (Bartram 2001; Deem 1986, 1987; Dilley & Scraton 2010); (iii) by tracing possibilities and limits for transgressions of normative femininity and masculinity (Chase 2006; Grindstaff & West 2006; Heywood & Dworkin 2003; Ravel & Rail 2006; Rousel et al. 2010). Unresolved tensions between subversion and conformity to gender norms are central to each approach; with many authors concluding that sport is a site where "the boundaries of gender difference are being crossed as well as preserved" (Grindstaff & West 2006: 515). Similarly, there are on-going tensions between structure and agency, seen in arguments that while 'empowering and a form of resistance' at a 'personal level', women's sport remains 'framed by the parameters of material and structural influence and constraint' and the 'persisting power of patriarchy'

(Wheaton & Thomlinson 1998; 270). Similar themes characterize research on gender and subculture more broadly (Leblanc 1999; Lumsden 2010).

Roller derby presents a somewhat unique empirical context from which to engage with these themes (Breeze 2010), by virtue of its status as an emergent, DIY, women's sport (Beaver 2012; Carlson 2010, 2011; Finley 2010, Hern 2010; Pavlidis 2012; Pavlidis & Fullagar 2012). At its simplest, roller derby is a full contact team sport played on roller skates. Skating in roughly the same anti-clockwise direction on a flat oval track, two teams compete for points. Five skaters from each team of 14 are fielded to the track (most often marked out in gaffer tape on the surface of indoor sports courts) at the start of each 'jam'; one skater from each five is designated as the jammer, identifiable by the star on her helmet cover. The jammer accumulates points for her team for every opposing skater that she overtakes.

The remaining four skaters on track for each team are blockers, tasked with assisting their jammer through the pack, and simultaneously with hindering the progress of the opposing jammer. They may legally do so using active and aggressive hip, shoulder and full-body checks to knock the jammer and opposing blockers to the ground or off the track, or with tactical variations in speed and direction of travel, or by simply planting oneself immediately in the way of the jammer and resisting her forward motion. At the end of each a two-minute jam a fresh pack of five skaters from each team is fielded to the track, a process which repeats itself indefinitely over the course of each hour-long bout, at the end of which the team with the most points wins. This consideration of gameplay, tactics and rules of contemporary roller derby is necessarily brief, (see WFTDA 2013 for a full elaboration) as the article is centrally concerned with roller derby's ambivalent and gendered relation to a broader 'cultural field' or social space of sport (Bourdieu 1988, 1991), by virtue of its status as an emergent, DIY, women's sport.

Despite a history of various for-profit and co-ed manifestations of roller derby (Joulwan 2007; Mabe 2007), its contemporary form has only been played in the United Kingdom since 2006. At its founding in 2008 the group I research with was one of just four others in the UK, now there are over 100 leagues in operation. Roller derby in the UK initially developed outside of established sports institutions and

governing bodies. ‘Leagues’, geographically located organizations fielding up to seven home and travel teams, are administered, governed, promoted, coached, financed and managed by their members; skaters, referees and ‘non-skating members’, who are often themselves injured or retired skaters. Despite the recent and significant emergence of a growing number of men’s leagues in the UK, roller derby remains predominantly played by self-identifying women. These empirical features contextualize the ambivalences of skaters’ definitions of roller derby and their understandings of its relation to a broader field of sport.

Roller derby has very often been understood, by participants and academics alike, as occupying a position of gendered alterity in relation to established sports practices. Previous research has a tendency to elaborate this relationship, emphasizing roller derby’s DIY organization (Beaver 2012) in combination with its women-led character (Finley 2010) and questioning the potential for gender subversion in roller derby, often with reference to derby names (evidently fabricated names that skaters adopt often involving a pun or a more or less obscure cultural reference) and to some practices of dress in roller derby especially the wearing of fishnet tights, short skirts and/or sparkly hot-pants (Cohen 2008; Carlson 2010, 2011). Initially participants too tended to articulate roller derby as unique because of its status as a DIY women’s sport, and by virtue of opportunities for challenging, subverting or playing with normative femininity.

Such understandings of roller derby and it’s relation to a broader field of sport are very much changing however, as skaters became increasingly concerned with roller derby ‘getting taken seriously’ as a ‘real, legitimate sport’. For example, while much existing research conceptualizes roller derby as a subcultural practice (Finley 2010; 360, Pavlidis 2012; 167), skaters increasingly articulate roller derby as ‘just like any other sport’ and many participants laugh at, and adamantly reject, interpretations of roller derby as ‘alternative’, ‘underground’ or ‘subcultural’. Skaters’ definitions of roller derby shift from being ‘like a sport for women who don’t like sport’ to being ‘for people who really, really like sport’. Describing roller derby for this paper thus echoes these ambivalences, which involve skaters renouncing a subcultural position, and embarking upon familiar processes of institutionalization.

Working in the context of current debates about post-feminism and the third wave (McRobbie 2007; 2009), and that of on-going concerns with 'authenticities', 'mainstreaming', and 'incorporation' in work with subculture (Furness 2012; Thorton 1995, Thorpe & Wheaton 2011) this paper asks how the specifically gendered character of roller derby's relation to a broader field of sport might shift as skaters become more interested in sporting legitimacy. For instance, in their research with a UK-based rugby union club for gay and bisexual men, Price & Parker explore the possibilities for 'challenges to gender norms' (2003; 108) in gay sports subculture, and suggest that the club can either be 'co-opted into mainstream rugby culture' (2003; 108) or challenge the same; it is an either/or possibility:

> 'Gay sports culture either promotes a liberal view of "inclusion" into mainstream sporting arenas, or, alternatively, challenges heterosexist definitions of sport as an "exclusive" cultural practice.'
>
> - Price & Parker 2003; 109

Price and Parker argue that while 'stereotypes' are disrupted by the club's existence and everyday practice (2003; 109) ultimately 'heterosexist definitions of sport' are 'reinforced' (2003; 121) as the club attempted to 'gain respect within mainstream rugby culture' (2003; 122) and as playing competitively and winning games became seen as a route to sporting legitimacy.

I suggest that while the league initially appears to be following a comparable trajectory, of sporting legitimacy increasingly prioritized at the expense of political or feminist potential, empirical material demonstrates that rather than a straightforward de-politicization or mainstreaming of the league, the situation has much more ambivalence than such an interpretation allows for. Participants make claims for roller derby's inclusion in existing institutions and seek recognition in dominant discourses of 'sport' at the same time as they ridicule and negate the gendered terms of such inclusion and continue to struggle to maintain the uniqueness of roller derby as a DIY women-led sports practice. Each of these dynamics can be interpreted as subverting or challenging a gender order that posits masculinity as synonymous with sport, and this leads to the argument that diverse and theoretically

distinct forms of feminist thought and action in practice co-occur, and thus can be understood as simultaneous, overlapping or mutually-constitutive.

This paper thus traces shifts in definitions of roller derby as a 'sport for women who don't like sport' to ask how the specifically gendered character of roller derby's relation to a broader field of sport shifts as skaters become more interested in sporting legitimacy, explore the role of ambivalence and make the case for a more concurrent understanding of diverse feminist tactics. Following a brief discussion of method I firstly consider roller derby as a 'sport for women who don't like sport', and an ethnographic account of practices that advocate for the special character of roller derby by virtue of it being women-led or women-dominated, roughly analogous to 'radical feminism', and practices that unsettle a binary conception of gender, broadly analogous to 'third wave' or 'queer feminism'. Secondly, I discuss how participants are increasingly concerned with roller derby's recognition as 'real, serious sport'. Definitions of roller derby shift to being 'for people who really, really like sport' and skaters seek inclusion in existing sports institutions and intelligibility in existing definitions of 'sport'; strategies that approximate liberal-feminist strategies. Thirdly however, despite an apparently linear narrative, it becomes clear that each strategy, whether based on criticizing, seeking inclusion within, or negating the terms of dominant sports discourse, can, in practice, co-occur.

This paper grows out of and develops empirical material from my doctorial research, which is primarily concerned with elaborating an analysis of non-/seriousness as central to understanding how organizational and mid-level social change takes place.

METHOD & METHODOLOGY: Change, belonging & collaboration

A range of ethnographic methods, including full participant observation at all formal and informal league activities over a period of 18 months, in-depth semi-structured interviews with 26 skaters and referees, and a 12-week collaborative film-making project, grew from my own existing participation in Edinburgh's roller derby league. As the research progressed, skaters increasingly asked me questions like this one:

> ‘So, what do you think your PhD will be about now that derby’s so different to when you started?’
>
> (Aladdin, field-notes, December 2011)

Such questions point to somewhat of a methodological obligation to pay attention to the changes in the league that took place during the research period. My initial ‘pre-research’ involvement, and on-going but shifting participation is a key resource for this aspect of the research methodology. In the spring of 2008 I helped start the roller derby league that 18 months later I began research with, and I continued to play and organize roller derby for three and four years respectively, which overlapped with a total of four years research work. There is established precedent for researcher involvement, in ‘insider’, ‘participant’ or auto-biographical research, in work with DIY subcultures (Downes et al forthcoming; Leblanc 1999; Furness 2012), feminist research methods (Cooper 2010; Davidson 2011; Lather 2007; Reger 2001), sport sociology (Drummond 2010; Miller 1999; Ryder 2010), and qualitative methods in general (Brogden 2010; Chavez 2008; Lederman 2006; Taylor 2011).

Since 2008, in the words of one skater, the league has grown from ‘shambolic’ beginnings to being ‘a lot more structured now… it’s a lot more of a sport now than it was when we first started’ (The Beefcake, individual interview, October 2010). In 2008 membership of the newly formed league was sporadic, with between 4 and 40 skaters turning up to practice in a church hall for two hours once a week. In 2013 there is a stable membership of approximately 100 skaters using 16 hours of sports-hall hire each week. As organizational size and complexity increased, the nature of my belonging also shifted as repeated injury led me to hang up my skates and eventually quit my membership in 2012.

That the league I research with is a new organization, run on DIY principles, for playing an emergent sport, means that skaters’ quotidian practices are, in part, a question of working out what roller derby and sport mean in practice; of working out what roller derby *is*. The league is a creative and collaborative project, a context that, alongside the challenges of researching in a familiar context, inspired my use of participatory film-making as method. The project involved inviting skaters to participate in a series of two-hour workshops, the proceedings of which I audio and

video recorded, transcribed and manually coded. Approximately six to eight skaters joined each workshop, and the sessions moved through designing, filming and editing together a short film about roller derby, the league and the skaters themselves. For instance, in the pre-production, designing sessions I facilitated group work tasks, asking skaters to discuss and assess existing media representations of roller derby, brainstorm possible themes and genres for their film, debate how best to portray roller derby, imagine an audience and narrow down what should actually be filmed.

The film-making workshops generated an abundance of empirical material. Drawing on Gauntlett's (2007) work on creative methods, the project engaged participants in debates over how best to articulate and represent roller derby on film. The workshops had the advantage of being a series of structured, bounded and contrived events that engaged skaters in a creative project that was homologous to the implicit challenges, of how to play, organize and represent roller derby and negotiate a relation to a broader field of sport, that skaters encounter in their daily lives. Workshop discussions were infused with questions of what roller derby *is, could or should be*, just as skaters' practices are in more 'naturalistic' or spontaneous settings.

Skaters agreed to participate in the research through a range of informed consent procedures: formal forms and declarations accompanying each interview; verbal descriptions of the research and agreement to participate before each workshop; an on-going description and discussion of participant-observation on the league's online message board; skaters' reading and commenting on their interview transcripts, sharing draft articles and thesis chapters. Additionally I compiled a mini-series of zines and a research blog, both of which report and reflect upon the research process and products, aimed at sharing research with participants in a meaningful and accessible format.

I use both initials and pseudonyms to refer to participants in this article. Where skaters choose their own pseudonym they often mirrored naming practices peculiar to roller derby; the taking on of a funny, evidently made up 'derby name', which usually involve puns, cultural references or obscure connotations. I thus attribute empirical material using pseudonyms including 'The Beefcake' and 'Sally Tape',

and less obviously, 'Pauline Baynes'. A combination of clearly fabricated humorous names with more 'straight' names and initials echoes current debates among skaters on derby names and recognition as 'real, serious sport', as some skaters choose to skate under their real name, others continue to use derby names.

To summarize, prior belonging and the use of film-making as method are particularly conducive to a nuanced analysis of change in the league, particularly shifts in the ways that skaters understand roller derby's gendered relationship to more established forms of sport, articulated in the once-common definition of roller derby as 'sport for women who don't like sport'.

ONE 'Like sport for women who don't like sport…'

19-11-2011 I'm walking back into town with Aladdin after a Saturday afternoon practice. Aladdin is rostered to coach tomorrow and has been planning how she will introduce of roller derby to the league's newest recruits. Tomorrow will bring the first practice of a new round of 'Fresh Meat', which initiates new skaters in 16 weeks of basic skills and 'minimum standards' training, in order that they become eligible for full league membership. The initial Fresh Meat session is new skaters' first ever roller derby practice. Aladdin has already achieved notoriety among a previous 'batch' of Fresh Meat, for introducing them to their first practice with the words 'you will cry at least once during practice, and you will throw up' (group interview May 2011). The next day I overhear her, as the new skaters have got into their kit and are listening with a familiar blend of enthusiasm and awkwardness as Aladdin tells them; 'People used to say that roller derby was "like sport for women who don't like sport", but actually, it is for people who really, really like sport'.

What is roller derby? Almost all members of the league have encountered this question; asked by friends, family and colleagues as well as newspaper journalists, radio hosts, television anchors and bemused passers-by who have just been handed a flyer. As members of a new organization playing an emergent sport, skaters are often faced with interlocutors who do not understand what roller derby is, or necessarily view it as a sport. As LH reports, 'my family members, they always call it "roller blading" [laughter] or like "roller disco" or something…' (group interview, May

2011). 'It's like a sport for women who don't like sport' was a very common answer to the question in the first years of the league's existence, especially when it came to enthusiastically persuading others to try derby and join the league.

'Sport for women who don't like sport' begins to indicate an ambivalent yet critical oppositional relation to 'sport', and is suggestive of how roller derby is a site where the relation between sport and gender might be configured differently (Breeze 2010; Carlson 2010, 2011, Pavlidis 2012), in struggles over the meaning of sport as well as of resistance to or subversion of normative femininity. Participants use 'sport' to mean different things in different contexts and to construct understandings of roller derby, as sometimes like sport, sometimes not-like sport, and most often somewhere in-between. It is foolhardy to treat 'sport' as a monolithic social institution and locating an unequivocal position for roller derby in relation to a broader field of sport would be theoretically trite as well as empirically disingenuous.

Roller derby as 'like a sport for women who don't like sport', is ambivalently both similar and different to sport, and chimes with definitions of ambivalence as a question of 'over-definition' (Bauman 1991, 8) and 'excessive meaning' (Bauman 1991, 3). Bauman opens *Modernity and Ambivalence* by stating that ambivalence is the 'permanent companion' and 'normal condition' of language (Bauman 1991, 1). Ambivalence itself is ordinary. Previous research with 'marginal' or subcultural ambivalently sports-like activities, with examples as diverse as cheerleading (Grindstaff & West 2006), parkour (Atkinson 2009; Wheaton & Gilchrist 2011), bodybuilding (Roussel et al 2010) and windsurfing, snowboarding and BMX (Thorpe & Wheaton 2011) sets good precedent for understanding 'sport' as a spectrum, and accords with conceptualizing sport as a dynamic field where the '*social definition of sport* is an object of struggles' over 'the monopolistic capacity to impose the legitimate definition of sporting practice' (Bourdieu 1991; 361).

So when Aladdin explains to an eager batch of Fresh Meat skaters that actually, what they are about to embark upon 'is for people who really, really like sport', an oppositional or critical relation to 'sport' is positioned as an outdated mistake, relegated to the past as skaters struggle for a position of sporting legitimacy. In the remainder of this section I give an account of participants' early descriptions of roller derby as distinct from and critical of 'sport', by virtue of its DIY organization and

status as a women's sport, and consider how skaters increasingly understand practices that involve subversive gender performance and unsettling the meaning of 'sport' as relics from roller derby's past.

In describing roller derby and the league's organizational structure and ethos, participants are adamant, 'we do it all ourselves', the league is 'not just like a club that we attend' (film-making workshop 06-09-2011). The distinctiveness of the league's DIY organization, with all members involved in decision-making via participatory committee structures is very often bound up with roller derby's status as a women's sport, and the gender politics of a broader conception of sport. Tiny Chancer elaborates:

> 'I think it's important that like it was a women's sport first and that, that at the moment women are the main event, the skaters, the owners, the organizers, the everything, apart from the men that are involved but you know we're the main people in roller derby and I think it's about time something came along that wasn't like the women's version of some well-funded well-advertised shiny happy men's sport you know…Like I remember hearing about somebody saying that they were the manager of a roller derby team or league and I just remember hitting the roof! I was just like, "no, just no" rollergirls manage themselves… there's nothing that needs to be outsourced when you have upwards of fifty women getting together and taking part in something, there's really no need when you've go this massive wide set of skills. I think that's massively important and I guess there's not a lot of sports that work like that, again I can't think of any, you know football teams have managers, and you do think of this guy, and it's always a man, and he's always got a horrible shell-suit on like anxiously chewing gum and taking all the flak for the decisions that they've made, and it's like well we make our own decisions you know…'
>
> (Tiny Chancer, individual interview, October 2010)

Not only is roller derby a 'women's sport', but it has grown and developed outside the usual male-dominated or masculine structures of institutionalized, professional/amateur or commercial sport. The league's DIY organization in

combination with it women-led character are regular features in interviewees' accounts of how they were initially attracted to roller derby and why they decided to join the league. These characteristics are sometimes used to describe roller derby as a different way of doing sport, and to suggest that 'sport' might mean something different in this DIY, women-lead context.

For instance, as Orville tells of her impressions of watching a practice for the first time and she paints a picture of a collection of gleefully liberated sports rejects:

> 'We were like "woah this is cool, it's like all the misfits from like gym class, together" it was quite like what we were like high-school, you know there was quite a lot of fat people in small clothes and jumping around and just being a bit free and we thought this is quite cool… we kind of said "yeah you know we might fit in with that kind of sporting environment."'
>
> (Orville, individual interview, June 2011)

In Orville's recollection of joining the league in May 2009 the gym-class misfits, and the freely jumping 'fat people in small clothes' come to represent a sporting environment that was significantly different enough from other forms of sport that Orville felt it was a context where she might 'fit in'. Similarly Kathy Hacker (individual interview, October 2010) describes how roller derby appealed to her initially by virtue of it apparently not being 'commercialized' like other sports and because the league didn't enshrine the value of competition above all else.

Existing research has highlighted the interrelation between roller derby's DIY organization and its status as a women's sport developed outside existing sports institutions. Finley suggests that because 'women own and operate their own do-it-yourself teams' (2010, 367-368) roller derby is 'a challenge to gender beyond women's simple participation in competitive sports' (2010, 367-368). That roller derby is, or rather was, a women's sport *sui generis,* in contrast to other forms of sport, enabled participants to describe roller derby as different and special, and as therefore potentially transgressive by virtue of its women-led status:

> ‘The thing with derby is that it is something *for women*, it’s not been re-appropriated [from men], it is structured for women in the first place, and you know to a large extent the only way that women were ever going to get a sport to themselves was in a subversive alternative way, because the world is sexist.’
>
> (SF, individual interview, May 2011)

Situated in a landscape as gendered as that of sport, it appears that ‘women’s sport’, initially at least, can’t help but occupy a critical, oppositional or subversive position. Interviewees place great emphasis on how roller derby is ‘structured for women in the first place’ where ‘women are the main people’ making ‘our own decisions’ and that perhaps, this context leads to roller derby being a place where it is possible to be ‘a bit free’. From such a perspective it seems that participants articulate roller derby as, in some ways, broadly analogous to radical feminist politics; seeking to create a women-led, if not women-only, sports context in which there is an absence of shell-suit wearing and gum-chewing, assumed to be male, mangers. Roller derby here is understood as a version of sport that is an alternative to existing male-dominated sports institutions.

Furthermore, existing sociological engagements with roller derby continue themes from sociologies of sport largely concerned with evaluating possibilities for subversion of and resistance to hegemonic versions of masculinity and femininity. Practices of dress in roller derby, and the tradition of taking on a ‘derby name’ are frequently interpreted as opportunities for playing with what have been variously called ‘spectacular’, ‘emphasized’, ‘hegemonic’. ‘heteronormative’ and ‘pariah’ femininities (Finley 2010; Pavlidis & Fullagar 2012) and for the possibility of gender subversion. Carlson is indicative as she discusses derby names ‘One of the most noticeable differences between roller derby and other women’s sports is the use of a stage name, known within the League as a derby name’ (2010, 433), characterizes such names as articulating a ‘violent, sexually raw femininity’ (Carlson 2010: 433) and considers dress; ‘Always showcasing skaters’ menacing names, skater uniforms usually include short skirts, ripped fishnets and exposed panties’ (Carlson 2011, 86). These dynamics are visible in the league, for example as SSF recalls watching a bout for the first time and the appeal of hot-pants, fishnets and make-up:

> ‘I’ve played sports my whole life but never one that you could wear hot-pants and fishnets and wear make-up and you know, great! I like that about roller derby a lot, I mean every sport has its look and its uniform, but I just, I don’t know, it looked fun, you know you kinda got to play dress up as well as play a sport.’
>
> (SSF, individual interview, May 2011)

SSF relates her first impressions of roller derby to her sports background, roller derby compares favorably by virtue of ‘being able to play dress up as well as play a sport’. Similarly Kathy Hacker espouses how, when she first joined the league ‘it was a joy to get my old fishnets out of the cupboard’ and cites opportunities to ‘play with my image’ and ‘express different elements of yourself’ (individual interview, October 2010) as typifying both the appeal of roller derby and its difference from ‘sport’.

For Orville, these same practices of dress are indicative of an oppositional relation to ‘sport’:

> ‘I guess it’s [wearing fishnets] about the freedom of the sport and the DIY aspect of the sport and it’s like it was maybe originally seen as a bit of a “fuck you” to the sporting world and any kind of authority that would say “you’re not a sport” and it’s like “we are a sport we can wear what the fuck we want”’
>
> (Orville, individual interview, June 2011)

Orville interprets these practices as being about making a claim for sports status: “we are a sport” but a claim that intervenes what it means to play a sport, particularly in definitions and conventions of dress: “we can wear what the fuck we want”. The femininity of high profile sportswomen, recent examples in the UK include Zoe Smith, Jessica Ennis and Victoria Pendleton, is the topic of much scrutiny in popular newspapers and magazines as well as academically. There is a tension in the literature when it comes to analyzing ‘emphasized femininity’ (Connell 1987) in various sports contexts (Breeze 2010). Interpretations swing between seeing discourses and

practices of femininity as neutralizing or 'apologizing' for the otherwise radical potential of women's participation in full-contact sport (Cohen 2008; Wughalter 1978 and see McRobbie 2006, 2007) and as subversively disrupting connections between masculinity and athletic prowess and femininity and passivity, frailty and vulnerability (Carlson 2010; Finley 2010).

Participants are far from unaware of these seeming contradictions, between 'femininity' and 'sport' as SF considers the imperatives involved with getting taken seriously:

> 'Oh yeah like "if you wanna get taken seriously don't show your tits" where have we heard that before? Oh yeah, like everywhere and derby basically just says "fuck you" to the entire thing on both sides.'
>
> (SF, individual interview, May 2011)

In these extracts however it seems that definitions of both 'sport' and 'femininity' are challenged as skaters say 'fuck you', on more than one occasion, to 'any kind of sporting authority' and to the double-bind of femininity/sport. As skaters wear fishnets and hot-pants to play a full-contact team sport, discourses of femininity as incompatible with full-contact sport, understandings of sport as a properly masculine pursuit and essentialist conceptions of masculinity that posit it as an essential property of male-bodied persons are interrogated. In these practices roller derby, and 'sport' and 'gender' are enacted as more contingent than immutable, and their meanings are subject to disruption.

However, such an interpretation is in itself problematized when we consider the movement between roller derby as 'sport for women who don't like sport' and, as with the ethnographic extract that opens this section, the notion that it might 'actually' be 'for people who really, really like sport'. The kinds of gendered performances of wearing make-up, hot-pants, the 'joy' of fishnets and opportunities to 'play with' one's image that are eulogized by Kathy Hacker and SSF, and that are often the keystone of existing academic interpretations are increasingly relegated to the *past* in skaters' accounts. I shared Carlson's (2010) paper, which includes multiple references to practices of dress and derby names, with skaters in 2011, and

Pauline Bayne's response was indicative, she suggested that the article, although recently published, seemed very out of date, and read like it was about '2005 style derby' rather than as it was played 'now' (field-notes, December 2011). When Orville suggests that, for example, wearing fishnets was '*originally* seen as a bit of a "fuck you"' an oppositional and critical relation to 'sport', grounded in gender subversion, is revised and positioned as outdated, as a dynamic that no longer applies.

There is a sense of development. What roller derby *is* shifts as skaters' describe a progressive trajectory away from what 'people used to say'. Skaters often re-interpret their own earlier accounts, which saw roller derby as significantly different from sport, as a product of the moment in time in which they occurred. Understandings of roller derby as intrinsically bound up with certain forms of gender play and subversions of femininity are rejected as outdated, as part of a past in which roller derby was not entirely recognizable as 'sport'. A certain kind of gender subversion, of de-coupling femininity from passivity, of 'spectacular' or 'pariah' femininity, so often lauded in previous research with roller derby (Finley 2010; Pavlidis & Fullagar 2012), is not entirely disproved by my empirical material, but rather is renounced by skaters as *what it used to be like.* Accounts of becoming more serious and more sports-like, especially when it comes to achieving recognition as a 'serious sport', are bound up with the gender politics of a broader field of sport.

This section has been, in part, an exercise in separating out in theory what in practice is resolutely conjoined (Latour 1993, 2011). Skaters critique their own accounts almost as soon as the words are out of their mouths. Stories of what 'people used to say' are most often told in contrasting relation to, and in order to make sense of 'what it is like now'. In the final section of this article the similarity and simultaneity of 'then' and 'now' is foreground in order to argue for the coincidence of diverse feminist tactics. The next section moves on to consider roller derby as being 'for people who really, really like sport', the decline in emphasis on its 'women's sport' status, and the claims that participants make for inclusion and recognition in dominant discourses and institutions of 'sport', somewhat analogous to liberal feminist strategies for gender equality.

TWO '… but actually, it is for people who really, really like sport'.

Participants are increasingly concerned with 'getting taken seriously' and with roller derby's recognition as a 'real, serious sport', processes that entail working for inclusion in existing institutions and intelligibility in the terms of existing definitions of 'sport'. As they do so, roller derby, 'sport' and perhaps 'gender' come to be treated as somewhat immutable, as less contingent and more inevitable. As definitions of roller derby as 'like a sport for women who don't like sport' fall out of favour, and are renounced as what 'people used to say' a gendered relation between roller derby and a broader field of sport increasingly becomes articulated in terms analogous to liberal-feminist thought, as participants prioritize '"inclusion" into mainstream sporting arenas' (Price & Parker 2003; 109).

In June 2010 I travelled to Leeds with The Beefcake to meet representatives from 11 other leagues around the UK, in the inaugural meeting of the United Kingdom Roller Derby Association (UKRDA). The UKRDA was established by skaters with an explicit purpose of lobbying for roller derby's status as an 'official sport', itself seen as an essential step in not only gaining access to government funding and local council run facilities, but in legitimating roller derby as a 'real sport'. The process of achieving official recognition necessitated establishing the UKRDA as the National Governing Body for roller derby in the UK, which in turn required seeking recognition from an already-existent umbrella organization, the British Roller Sports Federation (BRSF). Roller derby's sports-status is a question of organization and institutionalization. Being-and-becoming a 'real, serious sport' involves almost by necessity, the establishment of new institutions and their incorporation within existing structures of sports organization.

In addition to roller derby's progressive inclusion in existing institutions, the issue of recognition entails a second element, that of intelligibility within existing terms and definitions of 'sport'. Just as Aladdin positions roller derby as 'sport for women who don't like sport' as what 'people used to say', Orville looks back on her interview for a local news television crew in February 2012, and reflects that 'I shouldn't have said that bit about it being for people who don't like sport' (field-notes, February 2012). Skaters are self-consciously aware of how they represent and articulate roller derby through a variety of media forms. There is a broad consensus among

participants that roller derby is simply and self-evidently a sport, 'you know, it's like, people working together, doing something athletic, trying to win points yes of course it's a sport!' (Kathy Hacker, individual interview, October 2010). Such a consensus is coupled however with a parallel agreement that those not intimately familiar with roller derby do not take it seriously, or see it as a sport, and continue to think of it as 'just a big sexy joke' (Tiny Chancer, field-notes, July 2011) (and see Breeze forthcoming).

In the initial planning phase of the film-making workshops I asked skaters to discuss existing media representations of roller derby in books, documentary films and newspaper articles. Participants expressed their dissatisfaction with these representations, which were interpreted as neglecting to convey the sport-ness of roller derby. As Tiny Chancer and Sally Tape discuss a newspaper article they critique its sensationalized and gendered account of roller derby as a subcultural phenomenon:

> TC: Two-thirds of the article is about derby names, fishnets, hot-pants, weight, indy-rock, [laughs] …it's basically like a load of completely irrelevant information that's more about giving an idea about what sort of, style of person plays roller derby, you know an alternative person or however, it treats us as a kind of curiosity…. The article starts off saying "in the bowels of [sports center]"…
>
> ST: Yeah it says "suitably underground for this cult pursuit" [laughs] like how is a [laughs] how is a sports centre [laughs] how is a sports centre "underground"?! It's like, it's perfectly suited to a *sport*, because it's a *sports hall*!
>
> (film-making workshop, September 2011)

For Sally and Tiny it is laughable that the journalist is so explicitly misinterpreting roller derby in search of a subcultural sensation. When I ask how the article could be improved, Sally Tape responds: 'it should just be a commentary of the game I think… like any normal football or rugby write up.' Treating roller derby as 'just like any other sport' is bound up with strategies for gender change. Representing roller

derby, and giving an account of what it is, in ways that are 'like any football or rugby write-up' means not talking about what people are wearing, not emphasizing 'emphasized femininity' and not focusing on how roller derby is predominantly played by women.

Participants often reflected on the regularity with which roller derby is articulated as a 'female' sport, and considered the double-standard of labeling some forms of sport, and indeed most sport played by women, as 'women's sport' as distinct to, different from or subordinate in relation to 'sport', which, un-marked by gender is presumed to be played by men. For instance, in Orville's interview we consider the absurdity of applying a similarly gendered logic to more established sports:

> O: 'So we've got a sport of our own that we've created and it's recognized as a female sport or as sport that women play and I don't even know how you'd really define it, because sport, you don't say "men's football", you say "football" and "women's football" and "tennis" and "the ladies tennis" [laughs] so I dunno, it is a bit weird that we always say "all female roller derby" because it should just be a women's sport you shouldn't have to say…'
>
> MB: 'yeah you don't say like, "Hibs, an all male football club…'
>
> O: '[laughs] "Live, all male!" [laughs] yeah you don't really need to say that…'
>
> MB: 'I wish they did…'
>
> O: 'Yeah, "live football! Played by men!"'
>
> (Orville, individual interview, June 2011)

The discussion of how roller derby is marked by gender is continued in the film-making workshops, as skaters consider how the promotional posters produced by the league's Design Committee 'used to say "Live! All female! Roller derby!" (figure 1 & 2) but that thankfully, 'we stopped doing that' and made a change so that since the end of 2010 posters omit the labeling of roller derby as 'female' and simply proclaim 'Live Roller Derby' (figure 3 & 4) (Sally Tape & Tiny Chancer, film-making workshop, September 2011).

[figure 1 & 2] Posters for bouts hosted in February and August 2010.

[figure 3 & 4] Posters for bouts hosted in October 2010 and April 2011.

The implication of the planning workshop discussion, and of Orville's consideration of the asymmetry with which sports are marked by gender, is that labeling roller derby as 'all-female' on the league's posters is rather outdated, a mistake to be rectified and moved away from. The removal of 'all-female' from the league's poster occurred in a context where getting taken seriously and producing more sports-like imagery were central concerns. In 2011 the league re-designed it's logos and team uniforms and initiated a new structure, based on skaters skill level, and dividing the league into 'competitive' and 'non-competitive' wings. In 2013 the UKRDA admitted their first men's league as a member of the organization, and adapted their logo to include a blue, gendered-male figure alongside the red, gendered female figure already featured. The de-gendering of the posters appears to be bound up with narratives of progression towards recognition as 'real, serious sport' which include the jettisoning of representations of roller derby labeled explicitly as women's sport. Just as SF remarks 'if you want to get taken seriously don't show your tits' (individual interview, May 2011) this representational move seems to de-emphasize roller derby's status as a women's sport, playing down the challenge that an 'all-female' sport can pose to discourses of sport as synonymous with masculinity. Participants struggle with this move however, as the discussion of the removal of 'all-female' continued in the same workshop BM suggests:

> 'Isn't this a bit of an issue though, because isn't it at the same time quite cool that it's an all-female sport?'
> And others responds:
> LS: 'Yeah but you don't have to call it "all-female", you could call it "women's roller derby"…'
> Tiny Chancer: 'Yeah there's just something about 'all-female', it sounds like, I think it's a bit kind of dehumanizing somehow, it seems so kind of sensationalist…'
> AC: 'Yeah it's like "come and see some girl-on-girl action"…'

(film-making workshop, September 2011).

Rather than de-gender roller derby entirely it seems participants are struggling to walk a fine line between avoiding sensationalist accounts of roller derby as an 'all-female' sport whilst still retaining it's character as a sport for women.

Looking at subsequent posters there are visible changes in the form and content of the images, that are the manifestation of deliberate decisions to produce 'more sporting' and 'more serious' promotional material. The trajectory along tangled paths towards self-representation as 'serious sport' has included the production of posters incorporating somewhat obscure puns and cultural references which would not necessarily be recognizable or intelligible as 'sport' (figures 1 – 4). As well as the de-gendering of 'roller derby' from 'all-female' to simply 'live', the skaters featured in the posters have arguably become less and less marked by signifiers of gender, and more and more by signifiers of 'sport' (figure 5).

The posters reproduced above (figures 1 – 4) feature skates, and in some cases protective gear, in otherwise jumbled and somewhat confusing images, but the skaters themselves are not skating, and are not playing roller derby. The skater in each poster is rather involved in dressing up, as Elvis, MC Hammer or as a Coronation Street Zombie. While these images, including a half-hearted attempt to dress up as Harry Potter on a broom, do not entirely support existing analyses of a 'violent, sexually raw femininity' (Carlson 2010: 433), they do intervene somewhat in a straightforward presentation of roller derby as 'sport', or 'women's sport'. Until the summer of 2011 all the league's bouts were 'themed' in a similar way, normally in connection with a somewhat incongruous cultural reference drawn from film, television, literary or national popular culture. For instance, bout 'names' included; *Fishnet Burns Night, Jurassic Skate Park, Loch Mess, Hadrian's Brawl,* and *Crashablanca.* By summer 2011 however, the term 'all-female' and themes for bouts had been removed, jettisoned in favour of images featuring skaters actually playing roller derby (figure 5).

(figure 5) Poster for a bout hosted in June 2011.

So just as those practices previously interpreted, by sociologists and skaters alike, as being 'about' gender subversion are relegated to the past, roller derby as 'for *people* who really, really like sport' comes to be less about gender politics and an oppositional relation to sport, for instance:

> I do always think that's kind of interesting, whenever you're talking about roller derby it always goes straight to the feminism issues… the fact that that happens immediately also detracts from the sport [yeah] but it's not just about feminism [yeah, yeah] it's also about people that just really, really like proper sport and skating and working hard and training and that whole camaraderie team thing, so if I were to make a roller derby movie, I would have something that focused on, girls being on a sports team and you know everything that goes with it and then obviously you know you'd kind of have as a side line that this feminism thing comes up but not as a main focus…
>
> (BM, film-making workshop, September 2011)

Moves towards recognition as 'real, serious sport' appear to entail a movement away from the political potential of DIY women's sport.

Looking again to Bourdieu, the field of sport is where processes of professionalization, commercialization and institutionalization can be observed. So for instance, large-scale shifts occur 'whereby sport as an elite practice reserved for amateurs became sport as a spectacle produced by professionals for consumption by the masses.' (1991, 364). Here the ambivalence, and the change we see in the league becoming for people who 'like sport', appear as the emergent beginning phases of such processes. Distinctions between professionals, amateurs and consumers (1991, 364; 1988, 159-160) are not (yet) established in the league. No one is yet paid to play roller derby, although outside the league a small handful of sponsorship contacts have been won by skaters in the UK. While all skaters in the league can be described as amateurs, there are not yet any fully professional equivalents.

This is not to say that the league is free from struggles over the power to establish legitimate definitions and *distinctions*. The tension between 'sport for women who like sport'/ 'for people who really, really like sport' is orientated towards a pair of

related distinctions. Firstly, between roller derby and 'sport', and then again between people who do and do not 'like sport'. When skaters express roller derby as 'like sport', for people who 'like sport', this is a claim for a lack of distinction. Thorton highlights how distinctions 'usually entail some claim to authority and presume the inferiority of *others.*' (1995 10). Similarly, Bourdieu claims that professionalization 'comes with a dispossession of lay people, who are reduced little by little to the role of spectators.' (1988, 160). While roller derby, when described as 'like sport', for people who 'like sport', is aimed at erasing or overcoming a distinction between roller derby/sport, a distinction between *people* who either like, or dislike sport, remains. The disavowal of roller derby's designation as being for 'women who don't like sport' is a revision in what roller derby *is*. There is a change from roller derby being a new, different, subversive form of sport, that is *for women* and intervenes in the meanings of 'sport' and femininity, to roller derby as a liberal exercise in women's inclusion in organizations and definitions of 'sport'.

This short evocation of skaters' articulations of their sport over the period of research indicates how as roller derby changes, skaters' understandings and practices of self-representation change and increasingly involve strategies broadly analogous to liberal feminist thought and action. Specifically skaters have sought inclusion in existing institutions and intelligibility according to existing terms and definitions of 'sport', in particular by removing markers of gender and subculture from what roller derby *is*. In such contexts 'sport' appears to take on a certain immutability. The task becomes making roller derby commensurate with pre-existing, apparently solid, stable and settled institutions and definitions of 'sport', without necessarily unsettling the meaning of 'sport' or gender. In the third and final section of this article I unsettle the narrative given thus far by foregrounding the ambivalence of roller derby's gendered relation to a broader field of sport in order to argue that participants make claims for roller derby's inclusion in existing institutions and seek recognition in dominant discourses of 'sport' at the same time as they ridicule and negate the gendered terms of such inclusion and continue to struggle to maintain the uniqueness of roller derby as a DIY women-led sports practice.

THREE Ambivalence and Coincidence

While something of a linear movement is discernable in my empirical material, a trajectory away from roller derby as oppositional, subcultural and subversive gender, towards roller derby as institutionalized, included in established sporting organizations, as unconcerned with subverting binary gender and as changing itself so as to be more commensurate with and recognizable as 'sport', is in practice far from complete, unified or straightforward, but rather is riddled with a pervasive ambivalence.

Thus far the paper has considered three components to skaters' understandings of roller what roller derby is, which each represent engagements with a gendered relation to a broader field of sport. Firstly participants articulate a critical opposition to 'sport' by asserting the uniqueness of roller derby as a women-led, if not women-dominated, DIY sports practice. Secondly, participants cite the opportunity for certain practices of dress, 'wearing what you want', often interpreted in previous research as subversive engagements with normative femininity, as a further instance of an oppositional relation to masculine or male dominated institutions and discourses of sport. Thirdly, and more recently, participants have began to focus on roller derby's recognition as a real, legitimate, serious sport, in the processes de-emphasizing roller derby's status as a women's sport, and positioning those practices of gender subversion, so elaborated on in existing research with roller derby, in the past, as dynamics that have been moved away from. While all three of these elements can be aligned with the labels often applied to different forms of feminism; radical, queer or third wave, and liberal, and thus can be theorized as distinct, I now turn to arguing that each engagement with the gender politics of roller derby in relation to a broader field of sport do, in practice, co-occur.

In general during the film-making workshops skaters were most concerned with crafting a representation that avoided what they saw as the sensational gendered clichés in existing media about roller derby, such as a focus on fishnets, hot-pants and derby names. Skaters prioritized demonstrating the hard work they put in to training, and to running the league, and showed roller derby as a real, serious sport while avoiding a focus on roller derby's status as a specifically women's sport. As demonstrated in the previous section, participants suggested that a tendency to 'go

straight to the feminism issues… immediately detracts from the sport' (BM film-making workshop, September 2011).

Given these negotiations and the circumstances in which they occur, it initially appears that enacting roller derby as a real, serious sport inculcates a liberal-feminist form of gender politics, in which women's sport is the occasion for women's inclusion in institutions previously dominated by men, rather than the occasion for gender subversion, troubling the meaning of 'sport' or the creation of new women owned and operated versions of 'sport'. Such an interpretation follows well-worn paths in research with gender, sport and subculture, as when Price and Parker conceptualize liberal movements towards inclusion 'into mainstream sporting arenas' as preclusive of, in their example challenges to 'heterosexist definitions of sport' (2003; 109). Similarly with McRobbies' recent elaboration a 'post-feminist masquerade' in which women's entrance into the worlds of employment, consumption and 'lad culture' are 'predicated on the renunciation of the possibility of critique of hegemonic masculinity' (2007, 732).

My evidence does not accord with this argument, as even as they push for sporting legitimacy, institutional inclusion and recognition skaters frequently compare roller derby to 'men's sports', which come in for criticism:

> '…like my dad taking my brother to the football when he was younger, there was swearing and shouting and you know, the [roller derby] crowds don't abuse the opposing team, we don't encourage them to boo, we just encourage them to cheer, and I think the fact that it's so positive is such a good thing
>
> MB: why do you think it's like that, what makes it different?
>
> I always wonder if it's because it's run by women, I always wonder if it's like a bunch of women got together and they were like "well yes it's an aggressive sport but we want it to be fun and we want it to be entertaining and we want it to be something that people come to and they don't leave feeling angry they leave feeling happy and kind of

> elated by the whole thing" …when I watch men play any sport there's a lot less respect for each other, for the refs, for the other teams, and that's one thing about roller derby that sets it apart, there's so much respect for each other.
>
> (AY, individual interview, May 2011)

Contrary to McRobbie, some skaters, some of the time, do critique 'their male counterparts' (2007; 733), and the hegemonic masculinity that is so often said to characterize contact-sports. More than this, in seeking recognition, skaters bump up against the limits of intelligibility, and a definition of sport that would exclude roller derby. For instance, SF recounts explaining roller derby to her partner:

> 'I think that's one of the things, when you're explaining it to people, that's the hardest to sort of express, I remember talking really excitedly after the first practice and my husband is standing there is like "okay, alright" and we're like "oh yeah this and that and that and that" and really excited [laugh] and then at one point he was like "so okay just, so what are like the rankings and everything", and like I went, "um, oh" it didn't even occur to me to think about tournament structures or rankings or who you play and why, or who is the best [laughs] and but the guys went straight to it, obviously, this whole like "but who's better?" but we were like you just get together and you play, you kick ass, but you play! You don't even, it's really hard to convey that this [roller derby] is just people figuring things out…'
>
> (SF, individual interview, May 2011)

The problem of recognition, of seeking inclusion within and becoming intelligible as 'sport', and bumping up against the limits of such intelligibility is clear when, in an early film-making workshop, skaters considered how best to craft their own filmic representation of themselves, their league and roller derby.

In the following transcript extract LS has just finished considering arguments that women in film are often objectified, and she goes on to wonder how we could make a film that negated such trends and traditions:

> '…and of course if you're making a film about roller derby about women, by women, potentially for women we don't know who the audience is yet, if your gaze is going to be gendered no matter what kind of story you try to tell should we be telling a story at all? like how do we get past that?'
>
> (LS, film-making workshop, September 2011)

However, while skaters discussed how to avoid producing either a sensationally gendered or objectified representation of themselves, a number of more surprising suggestions were made when it came to the question of how to realize a representation of roller derby as a real, serious sport, on film. Participants went on to variously consider having 'animated unicorns running across the screen', using puppets made out of socks and wooden spoons, compiling a 'training montage' featuring skaters using children's playground equipment to work out, that the genre of the film could be 'magical realism', and making a film about 'traditional men's sport' in the style of clichéd documentaries about roller derby so focusing on tattoos, empowerment, make-up, clothing and gender normative day-jobs (Breeze forthcoming).

In their discussions of how to represent roller derby, and how to do so without falling into the many gendered booby-traps along the way, skaters bump up against the relative impossibility of crafting a film about roller derby as real, serious sport, given not just the features of roller derby itself, but the character of a broader field of sport in which women's sport is subordinate, widely posited as inferior and often the subject of laughter. Working in this context for roller derby's recognition as a real serious sport the suggestions above begin to appear as refutations and negations of the terms of recognition and inclusion that take place at the same time as making claims for and movements towards that same inclusion and recognition.

In September 2011 there was a growing discussion of the relation between derby names and pushes for sporting legitimacy. A blog written by a well-known

skater based in the USA (Snap, 2011) argued that derby names were a barrier to roller derby being televised, receiving sponsorship and reaching a mass audience. The blog caused a stir amongst the league, with most skaters passionately responding, that for instance ‘if I call myself 'Mystery Ship' or 'Tiny Dancer' I can still play sport. The End.’ (Pauline Baynes, field-notes, September 2011). Considered from this angle roller derby’s inclusion in institutions and discourses of sport appears to be less a case of the dilution of roller derby’s political potential and more a process that necessarily involves a challenge and a change to the meaning of sport.

As when workshop participants prioritizing making a film about roller derby as a real, serious sport at the same time as suggesting that ‘animated unicorns’ or a film about ‘football’ but made in the style of typical roller derby documentaries could be potential routes towards this, something more complicated, and more ambivalent than straight-forward assimilation is at play. The suggestions in the workshops, and Pauline’s claim that she can call herself ‘Mystery Ship’ and still play sport are instances of action orientated both towards inclusion in existing sporting institutions and discourses of sporting legitimacy, that articulate a negation of the terms of such inclusion at the same time.

CONCLUSION

As ‘sport for women who don’t like sport’ roller derby practice involves strategies for gender change that are analogous to radical and third-wave or queer-feminist approaches, that unsettle a gender binary and the meaning of ‘sport’. However, skaters are increasingly concerned with ‘getting taken seriously’ and roller derby moves along sociologically familiar trajectories of institutionalization on a journey towards recognition as ‘real, serious sport’. Definitions of roller derby shift to being ‘for people who really, really like sport’ and skaters work for inclusion in existing sports institutions and seek intelligibility within terms of existing definitions of ‘sport’; strategies that are analogous to liberal-feminist approaches to gender change. Participants make claims for roller derby’s inclusion in existing institutions and seek recognition in dominant discourses of ‘sport’ at the same time as they ridicule and negate the gendered terms of such inclusion and continue to struggle to maintain the

uniqueness of roller derby as a DIY women-led sports practice. Engagements with roller derby's gendered relation to a broader field of sport at first appear to align neatly with distinct manifestations of feminism: liberal, queer or third wave, and radical. Upon closer inspection however, it becomes clear that the situation is much more ambivalent, as skaters make multiple and simultaneous engagements with the gender politics of roller derby and sport more broadly. Rather than follow a straightforward trajectory to liberal assimilation with 'mainstream' sports institutions and discourses, skaters unsettle the terms of such an assimilation at the same time as pursuing roller derby's recognition as a real, serious sport. This paper has not set out to argue either for or against distinctions between different feminist approaches. The aim has been, rather, to demonstrate the coincidence, in practice, of tactics that are commonly attributed to each approach.

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Appendix ii List of Participants

(a) Interviewees, Workshop Participants, Key Informants

1. **Alabama Thunder Fuck** (Individual interview June 2011, university room) Alabama skated with the league since 2008, and made the switch to full-time refereeing in 2010 and moved to London to referee for London Roller Girls and Southern Discomfort Roller Derby in 2012. During her time with the league Alabama served on the Board, and many committees, particularly Referees and Sports & Training. At present Alabama has refereed over 180 games across the UK, Europe and North America, including multiple appearances as Head Ref for national and international tournaments, for both women's and men's roller derby. Alabama is fully certified both by WFTDA and MRDA, and is currently the MRDA Regional Representative for officiating in Europe, as well as the Officiating Area Coordinator for WFTDA's apprentice programmes in the UK/IRE. In 2013, Alabama sees herself moving towards more of a governance and organizational role in roller derby officiating.
2. **Aladdin** (Key informant. Paired interview with Sally Tape, June 2011, university room) Aladdin joined the league in 2009, and left in 2012. During her membership she skated on the league's 'A' and 'B' team, captaining the 'B' team multiple times in 2010/11 and also acted as captain for a home team during the inaugural season in 2012. Aladdin served on the Board, New Skaters Committee and Sports & Training Committee. While I lived in a shared flat with Tiny Chancer (June 2010 – October 2011) Aladdin and Sally Tape lived together in Felicity's flat just one block away. The four of us often travelled to practices and bouts together, and spent time hanging out at each other's flat.
3. **AY** (Individual interview May 2011, AY's flat & May 2012, coffee shop) AY joined the league in 2010 after meeting skaters talking about roller derby at a 'Feminist Day School' event. When I first interviewed AY she had her leg in a cast, from a derby injury sustained almost immediately upon successful completion of Fresh Meat. By the time of her second interview AY's leg had healed and she was embarking upon the difficult process of returning to skating. During her time with the league AY worked on New Skaters' Committee and as line-up manager for a home team (in 2012 and 2013 seasons). AY is currently in the middle of a round-the-world trip with her partner.
4. **BD** (Group interview, May 2011, university room) BD joined the league in early 2011, and was a Fresh Meat skater at the time of the group interview, during her time with the league BD put her professional knowledge as an Osteopath to use as a member of Sports & Training Committee successfully completed her WFTDA minimum standards later in 2011. BD continues to offer a discount for league skaters and fans at her practice.

5. **BS** (Individual interview, June 2011, university room) BS was familiar with roller derby from time spent living in Carolina a few years previously, but only started skating after joining the league in early 2011, a few months prior to her interview. BS saw a league poster at her local gym, and persuaded her husband and three small children to join her watching a bout that same afternoon, after which she immediately signed up to Fresh Meat. At the time of interview BS was nervously anticipating the up-coming WFTDA standards assessments, getting in extra skate-time at her local village hall as well as on the street outside her house, and enjoying being able to involve her whole family in watching the league's bouts.
6. **FK** (Individual interview May 2011, university room) BBT started skating when she joined the league in September 2010, after hearing about roller derby and the league through the Edinburgh Festival Fringe programme. After attending a bout in August BBT went straight home and signed up for the next Fresh Meat. BBT helped organize and took part in extra practice sessions for Fresh Meat, outwith the 'official' league programme. At the time of interview BBT had recently passed her WFTDA minimum standards and progressed to the 'main' league practices.
7. **Felicity** (Key informant) Felicity joined the league in early 2009, alongside Tiny Chancer her later derby wife. Felicity lived with Sally Tape just around the corner from Tiny Chancer and I during 2010 and 2011, until she relocated with her partner to Aberdeen, and began to skate for the Granite City Roller Girls. When Felicity moved out, Aladdin moved in. Felicity skated for the league's 'A' and 'B' teams multiple times, as well as for Team Scotland in the inaugural World Cup in Tornonto, December 2011. Felicity, Tiny Chancer
8. **Francis Abraham** (Group interview, May 2011, university room) Francis Abraham joined the league in early 2011 after hearing about roller derby from a friend who had started skating in Aberdeen. Francis Abraham remembered being really nervous, and particularly about coming along for the first time without knowing anyone else. At the time of the group interview Francis Abraham was Fresh Meat, preparing to take her WFTDA standards assessment, and had recently joined the newly set-up Sponsorship & Advertising Committee. Francis has since skated two home-team seasons as well as on multiple bouts for the 'B' team, her partner is also now a regular announcer for the league.
9. **Fred** (Paired interview with Wilma, June 2011, Fred & Wilma's house) Fred transferred to the league in late 2009, along with his wife, Wilma. Fred had previously refereed for Glasgow Roller Girls (GRG) and after transferring refereed multiple bouts and tournaments across the UK and Europe. In the early days of the league both Fred and Wilma would come along to practices to skate and help out, Fred taught me how to turn corners on skates. Fred played a key role in both the league's Fundraising and Referees Committees, particularly

coordinating ref crews for bouts and booking bands for after-parties. Fred has now plays roller derby himself, for the Jakey Bites.

10. **HT** (Workshop participant, Autumn 2011) HT joined the league in 2010, and attended multiple film-making workshops, along with her derby wife, BP. In 2012 HT moved to London and stopped skating, but while with the league she skated in the inaugural home season bouts, for the 'B' team and volunteered on multiple committees.
11. **Iona Rover** (Individual interview, October 2010, sports centre corridor) Iona Rover joined the league in 2009, after seeing a flyer in the changing rooms of Dawson's clothes shop in the centre of town. Iona Rover used money she won on the bingo to save up and buy her kit, and since then has skated multiple times on the league's 'A' and 'B' teams, as well as guest-skating and coaching for a number of other leagues, was a member of Team Scotland in the inaugural World Cup in 2011 and continues to skate with the league. Iona Rover played a key role as Spokesperson for Sports & Training Committee, as well a providing much coaching for the league, especially in the development of the Fresh Meat Programme.
12. **Marge** (Workshop Participant, Autumn 2011) Marge joined the league in 2010, and skated on the 'B' team multiple times, as well as for the first full home season in 2012. Marge played a central role on the league's Fundraising & Events Committee, organizing fundraising and booking bands. Marge worked with Marie to design and film multiple interviews for the film-making project.
13. **Irene Brew** (individual interview, May 2012, coffee shop) Irene Brew was at the meeting, held in the upstairs back-room of a bar in March 2008, where the idea for the league crystalized and manifested itself. Irene has been a key part of the league ever since, skating multiple times and regularly on both 'A' and 'B' teams and home teams as well as volunteering as a line up manager for multiple teams. Irene served on the league's Board as a Co-Chair in 2010-2011 and returned to skating in 2011 after giving birth to twins in 2010.
14. **Kathy Hacker** (Individual interview, October 2010, coffee shop) Kathy Hacker joined the league in 2010 and at the time of interview was completing her Fresh Meat training. Since then Kathy has moved to Exeter to do a masters and is now applying for PhD funding.
15. **Ken Doll** (Workshop participant, Autumn 2011) Ken Doll joined the league in 2011, completed Fresh Meat and skated in multiple home team and 'B' team bouts, Ken worked on multiple committees and has recently taken a maternity hiatus.
16. **KT** (Individual interview, June 2011, pub garden) KT joined the league in 2011 after initially joining GRG's Fresh Meat programme after hearing about roller derby from a friend involved in the Liverpool Roller Birds. KT was not initially enjoying Fresh Meat in Glasgow, and her friend BP persuaded her to join the Edinburgh league instead. At the time of interview KT was thus

completing her Fresh Meat training. Shortly after, and in response to dissatisfaction with the league's division into 'competitive' and 'recreational' wings, KT transferred back to GRG, and has since skated in multiple bouts. While with the league KT was very active as the Spokesperson for Merchandise Committee. KT no longer uses a derby name.

17. **Lady Garden** (Key informant, individual interview, March 2011, pub. Workshop participant, Autumn 2011) Lady Garden joined the league in the autumn of 2009, skated in multiple bouts, broke her ankle during training in November 2011, served as a Co-Chair of the Board and on multiple committees, particularly Sports & Training, Finance and Grievance. Lady Garden left the league in 2013. Lady Garden is also a PhD student and we shared workspace as well as an extensive friendship and support network.
18. **Marie** (Group interview, May 2011, university room. Workshop participant, Autumn 2011) Marie joined the league in 2011, and at the time of the group interview was completing the Fresh Meat programme. Marie was later to break her ankle during training, going on to recover and train as a referee. Marie has played a key role on multiple committees, particularly Sponsorship & Advertizing, and has also volunteered prolifically as an NSO and line-up manager.
19. **Ophelia** (Group interview, May 2011, university room) Ophelia joined the league in 2011, and at the time of the group interview was completing the Fresh Meat programme. Ophelia later passed her standards and skated on the league's 'B' team, as well as volunteering on multiple committees, before returning to Australia.
20. **Orville** (Key informant, individual interview, Orville's house, June 2011) Orville joined the league in 2009, with her friend Jayne Grey, who had written a piece on the league for the Scotsman newspaper. Orville has been a member of the league ever since, skating in multiple 'A' and 'B' team bouts, international bouts and tournaments as well as Captaining a home team for the inaugural season in 2012, and breaking her leg during practice in early 2012. Orville served on the league's Board, and was the Spokesperson for Finance Committee from 2011-2012.
21. **Owlison** (Individual interview, Owlison's house, June 2011) Owlison joined the league right at the start, with her sister BB, back in 2008. Owlison's spinal problems meant that from the beginning she trained as a referee, and has refereed over one hundred bouts and international tournaments since, including the 2011 World Cup, as head ref and pack ref. After her pregnancy and giving birth to her first child Owlison took on the off-skates role of being permanent line-up manager for the league's 'A' team from 2011-2013, and also volunteered as line-up manager for a home team for 2012-2013. Additioanlly Owlison has served on the league's Board, Spokesperson for the Referee Committee, as well as on multiple other committees.

22. **Pauline Baynes** (Key informant. Individual interview, October 2010) Pauline Baynes joined the league at its inception, in April 2008. Pauline has since skated in countless 'A' team bouts, as well as on Team England in the 2011 World Cup. Pauline served on the league's Board, as Finance Committee Spokesperson, as well as on Sports & Training Committee. Pauline transferred to London in 2011 and since then has skatered for their 'A' and 'B' travel teams as well as on multiple home teams, taking part in numerous international tournaments. Pauline and I 'married' each other as derby wives after a bout in 2010.
23. **Period Drama** (Workshop participant, Autumn 2011) Period Drama joined the league in 2010, and has since skated on multiple 'A', 'B' and home team bouts, including international tournaments, and worked on multiple committees, including on the league's Board. Period Drama captained a home team in the 2013 season, and is now vice-captain of the 'A' team and plays a central coaching role within the league.
24. **Ronald Humps** (Individual interview, June 2011, university room) Ronald Humps joined the league in 2011 and completed Fresh Meat as a referee. Ronald has since refereed multiple bouts and tournaments, and plays a key role on Referee Committee.
25. **Sally Tape** (Paired interview with Aladdin, university room, June 2011. Workshop participant, Autumn 2011) Sally Tape joined the league in 2009, after using the league for a photography project Pauline Baynes and The Beefcake persuaded her to try on a pair of skates and have a go. Sally has since skated in numerous 'A', 'B' and home-team bouts, captaining a home team in the inaugural 2012 season. Sally has played a key role on the league' Design Committee and also skated for Team Scotland in the 2011 World Cup.
26. **SA** (Workshop participant, Autumn 2011) SA joined the league in 2010 and has since skated on numerous 'A' and 'B' team bouts, as well as both home seasons since 2012. SA regularly skates and coaches on the 'A' team and has played a key roll on the league's Board and Fundraising & Events Committee.
27. **SF** (Individual interview, May 2011, university room. Workshop participant, Autumn 2011) SF joined the league in 2011, and at the time of interview was completing the Fresh Meat training programme. SF has since taken a hiatus from skating to give birth to her first child and continues to work on Secretarial Committee as a Non-skating member.
28. **Sway** (individual interview, May 2012, pub) Sway joined the league in 2008 and went on to skate in multiple 'A' team bouts and national and international tournaments. Sway captained the 'A' team from 2009-2010, worked as a Co-Chair on the league's Board from 2009-2010, was Spokesperson for Secretarial Committee and volunteered on multiple other committees, especially Design and Sports and Training. Sway was also the league's WFTDA liaison, and was

instrumental in the league's application for WFTDA membership. Sway left the league in early 2013 to move home to Victoria, Canada.

29. **The Beefcake** (key informant, individual interviews, October 2010, my flat & May 2012, coffee shop. Workshop participant, Autumn 2011) The Beefcake joined the league in April 2008, and since then has skated in over 60 bouts and national and international tournaments, for the league's 'A' team, which she captained from 2011-2013 as well as the UK All-Stars, Team Scotland, Euro-Crash All-Stars and Team Festive Period. In the league The Beefcake has worked as Bout Management Committee Spokesperson as well as on the Board, Sports & Training Committee, and acted as both WFTDA and UKRDA representative and is currently embarking upon a trip to Europe to coach a variety of leagues.
30. **Tilda** (Workshop participant, Autumn 2011) Tilda joined the league in 2010 and skated in multiple 'B' team and home team bouts, and was vice-captain for a home team in the 2013 season. Tilda worked on multiple committees, including Sports & Training, Design, and Secretarial. Tilda left the league in mid 2013.
31. **Tiny Chancer** (Key informant, individual interview, October 2010, our shared flat) Tiny Chancer joined the league in 2009, after taking part in the league's first home bout in January 2009 as a 'jeerleader', dressed up as a zombie cheerleader. Since then Tiny Chancer has skated in numerous 'A' and 'B' team bouts, national and international tournaments, as well as for two full home seasons, and for Team Scotland in the 2011 World Cup. Tiny Chancer has served on the Board, as well as Spokesperson for Sports & Training Committee. I lived in a shared flat with Tiny Chancer for 18 months in 2010 and 2011, as such we very rarely stopped talking about roller derby and the league.
32. **Vagina Dentata** (Group interview, May 2011, university room) Vagina Dentata joined the league in 2011, after watching a bout and going to an after-party together with Marie. At the time of the group interview Vagina Dentata was completing Fresh Meat training, shortly after she broke her leg during practice. Vagina has since recovered, and returned to skating, and had worked on the league's Board as well as on multiple committees, and in 2013 has begun to bout.
33. **Wilma** (Paired interview with Fred, June 2011, Fred & Wilma's house) Wilma transferred from GRG with her husband, Fred, in late 2009. Since the Wilma skated on numerous 'A' and 'B' team bouts, served as Co-Chair of the league's Board in 2010-2011 and played an active role in a number of committees. Wilma spent some time skating with the recreational league, and left the league altogether for a period, before returning in 2013.
34. **XD** (Workshop participant, Autumn 2011) XD joined the league in 2011 and completed her Fresh Meat training later that year, XD left town at the beginning of 2012.

(b) Other participants

1. **Amelia** Amelia joined the league in 2008 and moved to London in 2010 to marry a skater from London Roller Girls in a civil partnership in April that year, and now referees for LRG as their assistant Head Ref. Amelia skated a number of bouts with the league between 2008-2009 until making the shift to refereeing full time, and has now participated in over 100 bouts as a skater and referee. While a member of the league Amelia coached, served as Spokesperson for Sports & Training Committee and also was a member of the Grievance Committee. Amelia and I lived closed together from 2009-2010, and often joked that we were 'rant-wives', not full derby wives per-se, but we would phone each other whenever we needed to rant and blow off steam about league business. I was a witness to Amelia's civil partnership in April 2010, Amelia occasionally visits Edinburgh and I crash at her house when visiting London.
2. **Bernadette** Bernadette joined the league in 2009, and is also a PhD researcher. Bernadette acted as Spokesperson for Grievance Committee, and skated on the league's 'B' team a number of times before leaving in 2011.
3. **Beryl** Beryl was instrumental in starting the league; it was Beryl who saw a poster for Glasgow Roller Girls back in 2008 and came up with the idea of starting the league. After working hard to organize initial meetings, practices, photo-shoots, and much else, down to the colours and name of the league, Betty left in the summer of 2008.
4. **BP** BP joined the league in 2010 and after completing Fresh Meat quickly progressed to skating on the 'A' team, after also skating in a number of 'B' team bouts. BP skated on Team Scotland in the 2011 World Cup and also took part in national and international tournaments with the league. BP left the league in 2012.
5. **Burger Queen** Burger Queen joined the league in 2012 and after completing Fresh Meat has skated for one home season in 2012 and in a number of 'B' Team bouts. Burger Queen began studying for a PhD in marketing, based on research with the league, later that year.
6. **Busty Malone** Busty was another key figure at the start of the league, she was the first 'Chair' of the league, and was instrumental in the league acquiring practice time and publicity. Busty moved to Dubai with her job at the end of 2008.
7. **CeeCee** CeeCee moved to Scotland in 2009 to study, after having played and organized roller derby for five years with a WFTDA league in Virginia, USA. CeeCee guest-coached the league on a number of occasions between 2009-2010 and often travelled with us to watch games. CeeCee moved back to the states in 2011.
8. **Dawson** Dawson joined the league in 2008, has skated in numerous 'A' team bouts, national and international tournaments, was on Team Scotland for the

2011 World Cup has vice-captained and captained the ‘A’ team from 2011-2013, skated two full home team seasons 2012-2013 and volunteered on Sports & Training Committee.

9. **Hilary Cliton** Hilary Cliton joined the league in 2009, has skated in numerous ‘A’ team bouts, national and international tournaments, was on Team Scotland for the 2011 World Cup, skated two full home team seasons 2012-2013 and worked on the league’s Board, Finance and Secretarial Committee.
10. **HF** HF joined the league in 2009, similar to Tiny Chancer after being a zombie ‘jeerleader’ for the league’s first home bout. HF volunteered on multiple committees and skated in a number of ‘B’ team bouts before leaving the league to go travelling in 2011. HF was notoriously always injured, from daily life as well as derby, and has recently returned to the UK and to the league.
11. **Issi Sullivan** Issi Sullivan joined the league in 2009 and skated on numerous ‘A’ and ‘B’ team bouts, as well as international tournaments and the first home season in 2012. Issi worked on the league’s Design committee and left the league in 2012.
12. **Jayne Grey** Jayne Grey joined the league in 2009 with her friend Orville, Jayne did much coaching for the league, as well as working on various committees, and skated on numerous ‘A’ and ‘B’ team bouts before leaving in 2011.
13. **KK** KK joined the league in 2011, and after completing Fresh Meat went on to skate in numerous ‘B’, and recently ‘A’ team bouts, as well as working on multiple committees, and specifically on Merchandise.
14. **SJ** SJ joined the league in 2008, and skated on multiple bouts between then and moving to Hong Kong with her partner in 2011. SJ was the Spokesperson for New Skaters Committee and did much organizational work in the early years. SJ was instrumental in the development and administration of the Fresh Meat Programme.

Appendix iii Research Information Leaflets

Researching Roller Derby

Any Questions?

Maddie Breeze

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07843306818

Social and Political Science

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Fay Bentos' Roller Derby PhD

Dear Auld Reekie Roller Girls,

As you might already know, I am just starting my Sociology PhD – and I'm doing it on Roller Derby...

What?

I'm doing PhD research on Roller Derby, specifically how skaters "do gender". This means how we act and what we say in relation to typical ideas about what men and women should be like.

So, for example one stereotypical idea about women is that we shouldn't be aggressive or violent. But Roller Derby not only lets us be these things but encourages and celebrates our strength and power.

I think Roller Derby is amazingly interesting because it combines a whole range of things stereotypically understood to be "things that men do" (like play an aggressive sport and organise it ourselves!) with "things that women do" (like look after each other, care about each other, and perhaps sometimes wear sparkly shorts...).

So in my PhD I want to explore what this means, both to us, the people that play Roller Derby and what it means in relation to sociological theories about women and sport, which from what I've learnt so far don't seem to be particularly sophisticated or good!

How?

I am hoping, if everyone's ok with it, to do an "ethnographic case study" of ARRG.

This would involve me coming to practices and meetings and writing about what happens, what we do and what we say. Being a massive geek I will then go through everything and look for things that relate to gender, things that relate to ideas about men and women, and try and write a thesis and possibly some journal articles about it! (My geek dream is to write a book about Roller Derby and gender...)

If anyone would prefer to NOT be included in this part of the project - or if you have any questions or comments - then please contact me either in person, by text (07843306818) or by email m.breeze@sms.ed.ac.uk. Being involved in the project is completely voluntary and you can decide not to be involved at any time.

I'd also like to invite skaters for "interviews" about your experiences of Roller Derby, why you like it, what you dislike, and what you think about it. These can be done either individually or in small groups, and will involve snacks!

What else?

I hope to do a mini-pilot-study this October and November to practice doing fieldwork (otherwise known as coming to practice and making notes) and interviews.

Part of the pilot study will also involve working out whether or not to use people's real names. Usually in social research everyone who participates is given a pseudonym so they can't be identified. But derby names make this complicated – as does the fact that it will probably be pretty obvious that the league is in Edinburgh. So I need to work out what approach everyone would prefer.

All information will be stored securely and in confidentiality, I won't publish anything that could identify individuals or the league without express permission. I also hope to be able to give feedback on what I'm doing – maybe via the forum. So if anyone's interested you can find out what I'm doing. And if you're not interested then you just don't have to look!

Appendix iv Monthly Update Example

14th March 2011

Dear lovely ARRG,

Again, its been a while since I sent anything about my roller derby PhD and it still feels like progress is very slow! I have mainly been doing tutor work, reading books, working on drafts for my board paper, transcribing interviews which I did in October [!] and making field-notes about what happens at practice and other ARRG events.

You might have seen me frantically scribbling in a dishevelled note book at practice – this is me making 'field-notes' on things that we do and say in the context of roller derby. I'll use these notes to write up an 'ethnographic account' of how gender happens in the context of ARRG, which is basically like telling the story of what we do, but with a view to saying something sociological about gender. Obviously this is a bit weird and if anyone would rather not be involved in this part of the research that's completely fine, just let me know!

I still can't decide whether or not to feature people's real names in my writing or not. It's a bit of a thorny issue and I might try and pick everyone's brains about it quite soon! If anyone has any thoughts or preferences on then I'd love to hear them!

For the purposes of my board paper, which is the main piece of writing I'm working on at the moment, I don't think I will include anyone's real names. I'll also let everyone have a look at it! It's not for publication or anything, the only people that see it really will be me, you guys, my supervisors and two other professors from the sociology department at Edinburgh University.

What's a board paper? It's a big long paper I have to write [10,000-15,000 words] that is a bit like a cross between a research proposal and a dissertation, I also have to do a short presentation. It's basically explaining where I am at in the research and getting official approval to continue with it. It covers things like; how does my project relate to existing work on sport and gender; my methods of finding things out, and any problems with these; what I have done so far and the direction I think I want to take in terms of what will the over-all shape and argument of my thesis be.

Phewff that's probably enough for now, but I guess just wanted to check in to say this is what I hope to do, but couldn't do it without lovely ARRG and definitely don't want to make anyone uncomfortable, so any issues at all, please let me know!

Appendix v Workshop Participation Summary

Date	Theme	Participants	N Total Participants
6 September 2011	Ideas & Brainstorming 1	HT, KD, Marie PD, SF, ST, T, TC,	8
11 September	Ideas & Brainstorming 2	SA, T, TT	3
20 September	Developing Ideas	A, BP, IM, KD, M, PD, SA, SF, ST, T, TB, TC,	12
27 September	Scenes, Storyboards & Script 1	BP, KD, SA, ST, TC	5
4 October	Scenes, Storyboards & Script 2	TT, XD	2
13 October	Equipment training	XD, SA	2
20 October	Equipment training	Marge, Marie	2
30 October	Interview filming	Marge, Marie	2
22 October – 8 November	Bout filming	XD, SA	2
N/A	Puppet filming	LG, T, TC	3

Total participants: 21

Appendix vi Workshop Outline Examples

Ideas and Brainstorming

Summary: In these sessions we will generate ideas on what we want the film to be about. We'll share our views on how ARRG and Roller Derby have been represented in other films such as 'Whip It!' and 'Hell on Wheels' as well as in other forms of media like newspaper and television reporting, and Leith FM. We'll talk about what we think 'the story of ARRG' is or could be, thinking about the league's past, present and future. We'll hear from Stitches about some film theory and we'll talk about who the film is aimed at, the style it should be in and what, if any, we think the 'message' should be. At the end of the session we'll summarise the key points so that the next workshop can develop these ideas into things to actually film.

Activities:

1. Introduction to the project & Snacks: [10 minutes]
   MB briefly explains. *Open process, but we need to make a film.*

2. What should the film be about? [5 minutes]
   Post-it-notes on the wall…

3. Roller Derby in the Media: [15 minutes]
   In small groups discuss one of Whip It!/Newspaper Article/Book Extracts.
   How are derby and the people that play it represented?
   What [if anything] would you change?

4. The Story of ARRG: [15 minutes]
   In small groups discuss:
   What is the history of ARRG?
   What does the future hold for ARRG?
   Think of a real or imaginary event that for you captures 'the essence of ARRG'…

   Break time [10 minutes]

5. ?Stitches and 'The Gaze'? [10 minutes]
   Stiches talks about the things she knows about film theory!

6. So, the film… [20 minutes]
   Who should we aim it at? [us? Other derby people? ARRG of the future? People who don't know anything about derby?]
   What kind of film should it be? [Documentary? Musical? Silent? Avant-Guard? Fictional?]
   Can you think of three key messages or themes that the film should convey?
   What should definitely feature in the film? What should be left out?

7. Close [15 minutes]
   Read out post-it notes.

The next workshop is going to be about turning these ideas into concrete things that can be filmed – what are the main things that people in that workshop need to know?

Developing Ideas

Summary: In this workshop we will take the main points from the 'Ideas and Brainstorming' sessions and work with them, narrowing things down, to come up with ideas for things to actually film. The aim of this workshop is to translate the previous ideas into things that we can film. So we'll talk about the over-all shape of the film: what should the beginning, middle and end be like? We'll discuss interviews, action shots and other ways of representing ARRG and roller derby on film, and we'll consider the details of who exactly we should film doing what, when and how.

1. Introduction to the project & Snacks: [10 minutes]
   MB briefly explains. *Open process, but we need to make a film.*

2. What, exactly, should feature in the film? And why? [5 minutes]
   Post-it-notes on the wall…

3. Recap key points from last time… [15 minutes]
   Talk about main points that came out of the discussion in the previous two workshops, narrow them down to the three most important things – a guiding framework.

4. Progression [20 minutes]
   What should the film show in the beginning, middle and end?
   What will be the effect of this?
   Does this fit with ideas from previous workshops?

   Break time [10 minutes]

5. What to film [20 minutes]
   What should we actually film in order to achieve the desired effect? [Interviews? Action shots? Scripted dialogue? People? Things? Music?]

6. Details [20 minutes]
   Interviews: Who? Where? What questions?
   Action shots: Who? Where? How?
   Dialogue: Who? Where? How?

7. Close [15 minutes]
   Read out post-it notes.
   The next workshop is going to be about taking all the concrete details of what to film that we've come up with and turning them into a detailed storyboard and plans for filming – what are the main things that people in that workshop need to know?

Story Boards and Scripting

Summary: In this workshop we will re-cap the decisions from the 'Developing Ideas' workshop and come up with more definite and detailed plans so that we can begin filming in October. This will involve going over the key points from previous workshops and working in small groups to develop sequential story-boards to plan each stage of the film, and then each individual scene. We'll also talk about details such as music, timing and location. We'll finish by re-visiting the criteria for the film from previous workshops and evaluating our storyboards. We'll decide on one over-all storyboard and detailed plan to be taken forward to the October filming sessions.

1. Introduction to the project & Snacks: [10 minutes]
   MB briefly explains. *Open process, but we need to make a film.*

2. Recap key points from last time… [10 minutes]
   Talk about main points that came out of the discussion in the previous workshops, especially the type of film, the message, details of what to film, the beginning/middle/end…

3. Over-all Shape [15 minutes]
   In small groups work to come up with rough sketches of what the overall shape of the film would look like, what should be the main events and in what sequence should they happen? Think about how this fits with the ideas and criteria for what the film should be about and what it should include. Will the things you're planning be possible to film?

4. Deciding on an Over-all Shape [20 minutes]
   Each group quickly talks through their rough plans with the whole group and we agree on which over-all shape to adopt for the film.

   Break Time [10 minutes]

5. Detailed Story-Boarding [30 minutes]
   In small groups, with each group working on a separate section of the film, work on making storyboards for each scene: what happens, with who and where? Bearing in mind that we will be limited to roughly three shoots.

6. Putting it all Together [15 minutes]
   Each group to present and explain their detailed sections to the whole group: How do your scenes contribute to the overall shape, theme and effects of the film? Why have you chosen to plan the scenes you have?

7. Close [10 minutes]
   Make comments, changes and agree upon the detailed story board and plan for filming.

Appendix vii Workshop Minutes Example

ARRG-UMENTARY Film Making Project

Ideas & Brainstorming Key Points

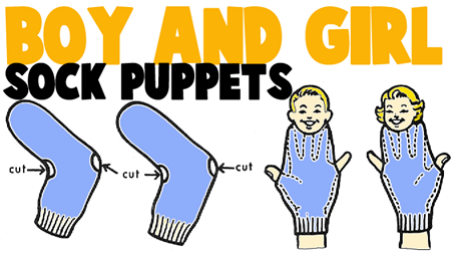
What is this?

This document contains the main points of discussion that came up in the first two workshops. The point of these workshops was to think up ideas for what the film should be like, who the audience should be and what should the film be about. These ideas are summarised below under the following headings:

1. Genre… *what kind of film should it be?*
2. Audience… *who is the film for? Who is it aimed at?*
3. Effect on the Audience… *what should the film make viewers feel/think?*
4. Themes… *what is the general topic of the film?*
5. Potential Things to Focus On… *what should feature in the film?*
6. Things to Leave Out…

Genre:

An "imaginative" or "magical" documentary. Loosely a documentary, but with the potential for 'extra' bits and not limited to straight interviews and action shots, more creative and artistic interpretation. So for example could include animation sequences, scripted dialogue, internal monologues, metaphors being interpreted literally, sock puppets or puppets made from wooden spoons, power animals, elements of a musical and things that are 'made up' but still convey the key themes and message. The film should show people rather than just tell them what ARRG and derby are like. It would be good if the film was new and made in a way never done before. We can use the style and structure of the film to convey something about ARRG.

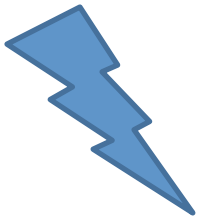


Audience:

Us as a league, and more broadly for the 'roller derby community' or people who are involved in roller derby already and familiar with it. It should be accessible to people who aren't familiar with derby but not catering specifically to them by for example explaining the rules or the history of the sport.

Effect on the Audience:

The film should make people want to skate and get them excited and inspired, and it should show roller derby as a sport. It would be good if the film made the audience feel like they can make things and change things by working with people, if it gave viewers ambition or if it showed how passion and commitment lead to achievement and if it conveyed our enthusiasm for something we love – derby.



Themes:

- Community, working together, by the skaters for the skaters.
- Roller derby is a serious sport and ridiculous fun at the same time.
- The growth and development of the league over the years.
- Hard work and commitment of running a DIY league.
- Conveying what ARRG *is*.
- ARRG is amazing/wonderful and challenging/hard.
- ARRG contains many different voices and experiences, the themes can emerge from a collection of different stories and experiences.

Potential things to focus on:

Organisation & Structure, Doing it Ourselves…

- ARRG as an organisation, the structure of the league.
- Hard work, time and effort put into skating and organising the league.
- Committees, and what they actually do.
- Policies, procedures, meetings, emails, forum.
- Democracy and voting [especially voting on how to vote]

Feelings…

- Personal anecdotes, stories, experiences.
- Achieving goals.
- What keeps us coming back, what makes us want to do it all.
- Friendships and amazing wives.
- The journey from fresh meat to bouting.
- How roller derby makes you feel.
- Rocky-style montages

Approaches

- Bout footage

- Interviews
- Possibility of re-interpreting footage with the people in it, overlaying internal monologues or personal narratives over bout footage
- Creative interpretations of anecdotes, e.g. an animation of Danger Mouth as a bowling ball smashing through a pack of bowling pins…. Or having sock/wooden-spoon puppets

Events/Things/People…

- In the future getting to the point where we can compete with Brawling or US teams…
- One-on-one sessions to get folks to pass their minimums…
- Flyering on the Royal Mile on skates…
- Mums watching boutcasts…
- The recent Q&A session, how everyone has a chance to contribute…
- Fresh meat sessions…
- Home teams…
- Social events and getting to know people…
- Specific bouts e.g. LRR and everyone playing as a team…
- Derby wives
- Wftda, world wide recognition, European rankings, global identity
- Roll Britannia as introducing roller derby to the world, coming 4th was a huge achievement, being kind of a big deal in Europe
- First time watching a bout
- Belles vs lrr when score was announced & thistles run over and made one big screaming hug

Ch-ch-changes…

- Professionalisation – becoming like a job?
- How when ARRG started it wasn't as slick, with less structures and less big ambitions
- As we get bigger how that makes it more challenging to maintain inclusivity and focus on fairness
- Different skill levels
- Rec League
- Harder and faster sport in the future
- Learning experiences, trial and error, advancing together with baby steps
- Friends got together and wanted to start a roller derby league and did with word of mouth it grew
- Future will keep growing and growing
- Training and teaching ourselves 'in the beginning', starting a league from scratch…
- How the league has progressed and moved towards being more like a sport…

Leave out?

- Descriptions of clothes, rules, injuries, day-jobs, clichés…
- Not a generic/boring/standard/cliché "derby 101" …
- Doesn't have to be about feminism or gender…

Appendix viii Constitution 2008

Auld Reekie Roller Girls

CONSTITUTION

This constitution was adopted on …1 April 2008……

NAME

1 The name of the organisation shall be Auld Reekie Roller Girls (and in this constitution it is referred to as "the Group").

AREA OF OPERATION

2 The area over which the Group shall operate shall be specifically the City of Edinburgh and more broadly Southeastern Scotland.

OBJECTS

3 The Objects of the Group shall be to provide a structured organisation to facilitate the participation of local people in the sport of 'Roller Derby' (the 'sport').

In particular the Objects shall be the advancement of public participation in sport for residents staying in the area of operation and particularly by:

The organisation, management and development of the sport;
Providing access to training, including facilities, equipment and coaching;
Facilitating membership of appropriate leagues for the purpose of establishing regular competitive play for the club's representative teams;
Promoting and maintaining the highest standards of technical competence and safety in the sport.

POWERS

4 In furtherance of the Objects, but not otherwise, the Group shall have the power to carry out any lawful activity.

AFFILIATIONS

5 The Group shall be affiliated to the Women's Flat Track Derby Association and abide by their rules, requirements, standards and procedures.
MEMBERSHIP

6 Membership of the Group shall be open to people falling within the definitions outlined in Clause 3. No person shall be admitted into membership of the Group until her or his application has been approved by the Committee. The Committee shall have the right to refuse membership in cases where it considers there are reasonable grounds for doing so. Any person whose application for membership is refused shall have a right to be heard by the Committee before a final decision is taken.

7 Membership of the Group shall not be transferable from one person to another.

8 A member may resign her or his membership of the Group at any time in writing to the Committee and shall be deemed to have resigned if she or he has not paid any membership subscription charge within one month of it falling due (except in cases where the Committee has agreed to waive such a charge).

9 The Group may, in general meeting, decide to terminate the membership of any person where it believes there are reasonable grounds for doing so. Any person whose membership is subject to termination shall have the right to be heard at the general meeting before a final decision is made.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

10 The Group may, in a general meeting, agree to introduce a subscription charge for membership, to vary the charge between one membership category and another and to revoke any charge.

11 The Group may authorise the Committee to adopt whatever methods it thinks most effective to collect payment of any subscription charge and to apply any reduction or waiver of any charge in cases where it thinks fit.

RIGHTS AND VOTES OF MEMBERS

12 All members shall have the right to receive notice of general meetings of the Group, and to attend and speak at such meetings.

13 Members shall have the right to nominate themselves or another Member to serve as a member of the Committee and shall have one vote, exercisable in person, at general meetings of the Group.

REGISTER OF MEMBERS

14 The Committee shall keep a Register of Members which shall include the name and address of each member of the Group and the date on which each member was admitted into membership. In the case of each Member under 18 years old, the Register shall also include a record of her or his date of birth or the date on which she or he will reach the age of 18.

GENERAL MEETINGS

15 The Group shall hold an Annual General Meeting in each calendar year and shall specify the meeting as such in the notice calling it. At least 14 days' notice of the Annual General Meeting shall be given to all members of the Group.

16 The business of the Annual General Meeting shall include:

16.1 reports by the Committee and the office bearers on the work of the Group since the previous Annual General Meeting; and

16.2 the appointment or election of members to vacant positions on the Committee; and

16.3 the presentation and agreement of the annual statement of accounts and the report of the auditor or examiner of the Group's accounts; and

16.4 the appointment of the auditor or examiner of the accounts for the next year; and

16.5 where applicable, the setting of annual rates of membership subscription for the next year.

17 The Committee may call an extraordinary general meeting at any time. Alternatively, at least 7 members of the Group may request such a meeting in writing, stating the business to be conducted, and the Committee shall call an extraordinary general meeting and will give at least 14 days' notice to all members.

18 The accidental omission to give notice of a general meeting to, or the failure to receive notice of a general meeting by any member of the Group shall not invalidate the proceedings at that meeting.

19 No business shall be conducted at any general meeting of the Group unless a quorum is present. 7 members entitled to vote upon the business, or one tenth of the total number of such members, whichever is the greater, shall constitute a quorum.

20 The Convenor of the Committee or, in her or his absence, another member of the Committee (with a preference for Office Bearers) shall chair general meetings. If no member of the Committee is in attendance, the members present may choose one of their number to chair the meeting.

21 Except where this constitution requires otherwise all matters put to the vote at a general meeting of the Group shall be decided by a simple majority of votes cast. In the case of an equality of votes the Convenor, or whoever is chairing the meeting shall have a casting vote.

COMMITTEE

22 The business of the Group shall be managed by a Committee comprising a minimum of 7 and a maximum of 12 Members, at least one of whom must be an Office Bearer.

23 The first members of the Committee shall be those people whose names are affixed as subscribers to this constitution. These members are elected at a unique Inaugural General Meeting which is held in accordance with the rules outlined in Clause 15. Future members of the Committee shall be appointed as described in the following clauses.

NOMINATION, APPOINTMENT AND RETIREMENT OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

24 At the end of every Annual General Meeting one half of the Committee (or if their number is not a multiple of 2, the number nearest to one half, rounded up) shall retire by rotation.

25 The Committee members to retire by rotation shall be those who have served longest since their last appointment. In the case of people who were appointed on the same day those to retire shall be agreed among themselves, or otherwise decided by lot.

26 A Committee member who is due for retirement shall be eligible to be nominated and appointed to serve on the Committee for a further term, without limit to the number of consecutive terms she or he may serve, provided she or he continues to be a Member.

27 The notice of an Annual General Meeting shall be accompanied by an invitation to all Members of the Group to nominate themselves or another Member for appointment to the Committee. Such nominations may be made:

27.1 in writing in advance of the Annual General Meeting; or

27.2 in person, at the Annual General Meeting.

28 At an Annual General Meeting the Group may appoint any properly nominated Member to the Committee provided that the maximum number of 12 Committee members would not, as a result, be exceeded and provided also that no member is appointed to the Committee who is disqualified under clause 33.1.

29 In the event that the number of nominations properly received exceeds the number of vacancies, a secret ballot shall be held among Members present at the Annual General Meeting. Those nominees receiving the greatest number of votes in favour of their appointment, up to but not exceeding the maximum number of places available shall be appointed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE VACANCIES

30 The Committee may co-opt any Member to fill any vacancy among their number that arises between one Annual General Meeting and the next, provided that no member is co-opted who is disqualified under clause 33.1.

31 A member of the Committee co-opted under the preceding clause shall only serve until the end of the next Annual General Meeting at which time she or he shall retire and shall not form part of the body of the Committee subject to retirement by rotation. Such Committee members shall have full voting rights, as if they were elected at the Annual General Meeting.

32 A co-opted Committee member retiring under the previous clause shall be eligible to be nominated and appointed for a further term provided she or he continues to be a Member.

REMOVAL AND DISQUALIFICATION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

33 A member of the Committee shall cease to hold office if she or he:

33.1 is disqualified from acting in the management of a Scottish charity by virtue of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 or any statutory modification or re-enactment of these Act; or

33.2 resigns her or his position by written notice to the Committee (but only if at least 3 members of the Committee remain in office when the resignation takes effect); or

33.3 is absent without reasonable grounds, in the opinion of the other members of the Committee, for a period of more than 3 consecutive meetings of the Committee and the remaining members agree to remove her or him; or

33.4 becomes incapable for any reason of managing her or his own affairs and such condition is expected to persist for at least 6 months.

ATTENDANCE OF OTHERS AT COMMITTEE MEETINGS

34 The Committee may invite or request the attendance at any of its meetings of any person or representative of any body for the purpose of giving advice, submitting information or evidence or otherwise assisting it in the conduct of its business. The attendance of such

people shall be in a non-voting capacity at the discretion of the Committee and may be for the whole or any part of any meeting.

35 The Committee may invite representatives of Members to attend Committee meetings in a non-voting capacity.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS' INTERESTS

36 Subject to the exceptions of clause 37 no member of the Committee shall hold or gain any interest in property belonging to the Group or receive any payment from the Group in respect of her or his position as a member of the Committee or as an office bearer.

37 A member of the Committee may be paid all reasonable travel, subsistence and other out-of-pocket expenses incurred by her or him in connection with carrying out her or his duties as a Committee member.

APPOINTMENT AND RETIREMENT OF OFFICE BEARERS

38 At the first Management Committee meeting after the Annual General Meeting the Committee shall appoint from among themselves a Convenor, a Treasurer a Secretary and a Membership Secretary.

39 Each office bearer shall hold office until the end of the next Annual General Meeting at which point she or he shall retire, but may be re-appointed provided that she or he continues to be a member of the Committee, subject to Clause 40.

40 The reappointment of any office bearer is only allowed up to a maximum of two consecutive years in that position, or if she or he ceases to be a member of the Committee for any reason or if she or he resigns from such office in writing to the Committee.

41 In the event of an office bearer retiring or resigning under clause 40 the Committee shall appoint a replacement from among themselves at their next meeting.

DUTIES OF OFFICE BEARERS

42 The Convenor shall be responsible for Chairing meetings of the Committee and of general meetings of the Group.

43 The Treasurer shall be responsible for keeping financial records, preparing accounts and giving financial reports to the Committee and to general meetings of the Group in collaboration with the auditors or examiners of the Group’s accounts.

44 The Secretary shall be responsible for keeping minutes of general meetings of the Group and of the Committee and for giving notice of meetings. The Membership Secretary shall handle the administration of all matters relating to the appointment and retirement of members of the Group and the Committee.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMITTEE

45 The Committee shall meet not fewer than 6 times each year. The Secretary shall give at least 7 days' notice of each meeting which shall include an agenda of the business to be conducted.

46 No business shall be conducted at any meeting of the Committee unless a quorum is present. 4 members of the Committee, of whom at least 1 is an office bearer, shall comprise a quorum.

47 All business at meetings of the Committee shall be decided either by general agreement or by a majority vote. All members of the Committee shall have one vote, but if the votes are equal the Convenor, or whoever is Chairing the meeting shall have a casting vote.

48 The Committee may, from time to time, make and alter any rules for the conduct of its meetings provided that no rule is made which is inconsistent with this constitution.

49 The Committee may set up any sub-committee for carrying out any task or duty on its behalf. The membership of any sub-committee shall be decided by the Committee provided that it shall include at least 2 members of the Committee. The Committee may, at any time, agree to amend or dissolve any sub-committee it has set up.

50 All acts and decisions made by any sub-committee shall be promptly reported back to the Committee for ratification.

FINANCES AND ACCOUNTS

51 All of the funds of the Group shall be paid into a bank or building society account operated by the Committee in the name of the Group and may only be in furtherance of the Objects of the Group. All cheques drawn on the account shall be signed by at least 2 members of the Committee who are authorised to do so.

52 The financial year of the Group shall run from 1st January of one year to the 31st December of the following year.

53 The Group and the Committee shall comply with their statutory duties under of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and subsequent regulations with regard to:

53.1 the keeping of accounting records of the Group;

53.2 the preparation and presentation to members of the Group of such statements of account, balance sheets and financial reports as are required;

53.3 the appointment of auditors or independent examiners of the accounts;

53.4 the making available to the public of the most recent statement of accounts of the Group upon request;

53.5 the transmission of the annual statements of accounts and the report of the auditor or independent examiner to Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator.

HERITABLE PROPERTY AND TRUSTEES

54 The Committee shall vest the title to all land, buildings and other heritable property held by or in trust for the Group and all investments held by or on behalf of the Group in not fewer than 3 people aged 18 years or over to act as holding trustees.

55 Holding trustees appointed under clause 54 may be, but need not be members of the Group or of its Committee. Any holding trustee appointed by the Committee may be removed and replaced by the Committee as it thinks fit.

56 Holding trustees appointed under clause 54 shall act with respect to the property or investments vested in them only in accordance with the lawful instructions of the Committee and provided they act only in this way and not further or otherwise they shall not be liable for the acts or defaults of the Committee.

AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION

57 This constitution may be amended by a resolution passed by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting at a properly convened general meeting of the Group. The notice calling the general meeting shall include notice of the resolution, setting out the terms of the amendment proposed.

58 No amendment may be made to clause 1 (the name), clause 3 (the Objects), clause 36 (Committee members' interests), clauses 59 to 61 (dissolution and disposal of assets) or this clause without the prior written approval of the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator.

59 No amendment may be made to this constitution which would have the effect of making the Group cease to be charitable in law.

60 The Committee shall promptly send a copy of any amendment to this constitution to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator.

DISSOLUTION AND DISPOSAL OF ASSETS

61 The Group may be dissolved by a resolution passed by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting at a properly convened general meeting of the Group. The notice of the general meeting shall include notice of the proposed resolution.

62 In the event that a resolution to dissolve the Group is passed any assets remaining after the settlement of any proper debts and liabilities, including the return of those items advanced or on loan and the repayment of the balance of any unspent grant where this is an agreed condition of any donor (whether statutory or otherwise), shall not be distributed among the members of the Group but shall be given to other such charitable organisations having similar Objects to those of the Group.

63 The Committee shall prepare a statement of accounts for the final accounting period of the Group and transmit such statement to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator. Thereafter the Group shall be declared dissolved.

_____

The persons whose names and signatures appear below are the first members of the Management Committee elected at the Inaugural General Meeting on ……1 April 2008……

Signatures. printed names and position of subscribers

Chair/Secretary

....

Team Captain/membership

....

Organiser/Vice Captain

....

Calendar/Finance

....

Fundraising Events

....

Fundraising/PR

....

Head Referee/Bout Planning

.....

.....….

Appendix ix Constitution 2009

Auld Reekie Roller Girls

CONSTITUTION

This constitution was adopted on …1 April 2008……
This constitution was amended on.....4 September 2009.....

NAME

1 The name of the organisation shall be Auld Reekie Roller Girls (ARRG) (and in this constitution it is referred to as "the Group").

AREA OF OPERATION

2 The area over which the Group shall operate shall be specifically the City of Edinburgh and more broadly South Eastern Scotland, the UK, Europe and Worldwide.

OBJECTS

3 The Objects of the Group shall be to provide a structured organisation to facilitate the participation of local people in the sport of 'Roller Derby' (the 'sport').

In particular the Objects shall be the advancement of public participation in sport for residents staying in the area of operation and particularly by:

The democratic organisation, management and development of the sport;
Providing access to training, including facilities, equipment and coaching;
Facilitating membership of appropriate leagues and governing bodies;
Promoting and maintaining the highest standards of technical competence, fair-play, safety and sportswomanly conduct in the sport.
Facilitating inter-league co-operation and competition through the organisation of and participation in bouts, boot-camps, mixed practices, guest skaters and tournaments.

POWERS

4 In furtherance of the Objects, but not otherwise, the Group shall have the power to carry out any lawful activity.

AFFILIATIONS

5 The Group shall aim to be affiliated to the Women's Flat Track Derby Association and abide by their rules, requirements, standards and procedures. In the future The Group shall aim to be affiliated to, and assist in the establishment of, any UK or European Flat Track Roller Derby Governing Body.
MEMBERSHIP

6 Membership of the Group shall be open to people falling within the definitions outlined in Clause 3. No person shall be admitted into membership of the group until she or he has met the membership requirements as stipulated by The Goup, specifically the Secretarial Sub-Committee. The Board shall have the right to refuse membership in cases

where it considers there are reasonable grounds for doing so. Any person whose application for membership is refused shall have a right to have their case represented to the Core Committee before a final decision is taken.

7 Membership of the Group shall not be transferable from one person to another.

8 A member may resign her or his membership of the Group at any time in writing or in person to The Board. In addition members may be deemed resigned if they have been inactive in The Group for four months or longer. And/or have not paid their monthly membership fee within one month of it falling due (except in cases where the Financial Sub-Committee has agreed to waive such a charge).

9 The Group may, in a Core Committee Meeting decide to terminate the membership of any person where it believes there are reasonable grounds for doing so in reference to the Code of Conduct and Grievance Procedure. Any person whose membership is subject to termination shall have the right to have their representation heard at the Core Committee Meeting, and will have recourse to the meetings outlined by the Grievance Procedure document before a final decision is made.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

10 The Group may, in a Financial Sub-Committee Meeting agree to introduce a subscription charge for membership, to vary the charge between one membership category and another and to revoke any charge.

11 The Group may authorise the Finance Committee to adopt whatever methods it thinks most effective to collect payment of any subscription charge and to apply any reduction or waiver of any charge in cases where it thinks fit.

RIGHTS AND VOTES OF MEMBERS

12 All members shall have the right to receive notice of general meetings of the Group, and to attend and speak at such meetings.

13 Members shall have the right to nominate themselves or another Member to serve as a member of the Board, Core Committee, any Sub-Committee or as Team Captain and Vice Captain and shall have one vote, exercisable in person, at general meetings of the Group.

REGISTER OF MEMBERS

14 The Secretarial Sub-Committee shall keep a Register of Members which shall include the name and address of each member of the Group and the date on which each member was admitted into membership. The Secretarial Committee shall also maintain The List which stores and manages all members' personal information of which The Group has possession.

GENERAL MEETINGS

15 The Group shall hold an Annual General Meeting in each calendar year and shall specify the meeting as such in the notice calling it. At least 28 days' notice of the Annual General Meeting shall be given to all members of the Group.

16 The business of the Annual General Meeting shall include:

16.1 reports by the Board and Sub-Committees on the work of the Group since the previous Annual General Meeting; and

16.2 the appointment or election of members to vacant positions on the Board and Sub-Committees (including Team Captain and Vice Captain); and

16.3 the presentation and agreement of the annual statement of accounts and the report of the Financial Sub-Committee auditor or examiner of the Group's accounts; and

16.4 the appointment of the auditor or examiner of the accounts for the next year; and

16.5 where applicable, the setting of annual rates of membership subscription for the next year; and

16.6 any and all other business.

17 The Core-Committee may call an extraordinary general meeting at any time. Alternatively, at least 5 members of the Group may request such a meeting in writing to the board, stating the business to be conducted, and the Board shall call an extraordinary general meeting and will give at least 28 days' notice to all members.

18 The accidental omission to give notice of a general meeting to, or the failure to receive notice of a general meeting by any member of the Group shall not invalidate the proceedings at that meeting.

19 No business shall be conducted at any general meeting of the Group unless a quorum is present. 20 members entitled to vote upon the business, or one tenth of the total number of such members, whichever is the greater, shall constitute a quorum.

20 The Chair and Co-Chair of the Board or, in her absence, another member of the Core-Committee (with a preference for Board Members and Sub-Committee Spokespeople) shall chair general meetings. If no member of the Core-Committee is in attendance, the members present may choose one of their number to chair the meeting.

21 Except where this constitution requires otherwise all matters put to the vote at a general meeting of the Group shall be decided by a simple majority of votes cast. In the case of an equality of votes whoever is chairing the meeting shall have a casting vote.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE GROUP

22 The business of the Group shall be managed by a Board comprising a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 5 Members, a Core-Committee comprising of the 2 Team Captains, The Board and a minimum of 11 and a maximum of 15 members drawn as Spokespeople from each Sub-Committee.

23 The first members of the Board and Core Committee shall be those people whose names are affixed as subscribers to this constitution. Future members of the Committee shall be appointed as described in the following clauses.

NOMINATION, APPOINTMENT AND RETIREMENT OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

24 The first AGM shall be used as a vehicle for the appointment of any additional members required to The Board, Core Committee and Subcommittees. And shall also be used to discuss and vote upon the system by which Board, Core-Committee and Sub-Committee members shall be elected and/or re-appointed in the coming years.

26 Board, Core-Committee members and Captains shall be eligible to be nominated and appointed to serve on the Committee for further terms, without limit to the number of consecutive terms she or he may serve, provided she or he continues to be a Member.

27 The notice of an Annual General Meeting shall be accompanied by an invitation to all Members of the Group to nominate themselves or another Member for appointment to the Board, Core-Committee, or any Sub-Committee. Such nominations may be made:

27.1 in writing in advance of the Annual General Meeting;
27.2 in person, at the Annual General Meeting.

28 At an Annual General Meeting the Group may appoint, by ballot, any properly nominated Member to the Board, Core-Committee Sub-Committees provided that the maximum number of members would not, as a result, be exceeded and provided also that no member is appointed to the Committee who is disqualified under clause 33.1.

30 The Board shall consist of a Chair, a Co-Chair, (elected annually from general membership), the Secretary and the Treasurer, (elected annually from the Secretarial and Financial Sub-Committees).

31 The Core Committee shall consist of the Board, the 2 Team Captains (elected from team members annually) and Spokespeople elected from within each of the Sub Committees.

32 The Sub-Committees shall consist of a minimum of 3 members working together in a set area, and include but are not limited to: Sports and Training, Finance, Secretarial, Refereeing, Medical, Public Relations, Sponsorship, Promotional Materials, Bout Management, Fundraising and Events, Grievance, Website, New Skater and Merchandise.

33 Sub-Committees can form working groups and can recruit general members to their ranks at their discretion.

34 Sub-Committee members shall not act as Spokespeople for more than one Sub-Committee.

36 Team Captains may not act as Spokespeople for any Sub-Committee. ????

37 Non-Members may join Sub-Committees but may not be elected to Core-Committee or Board positions.

COMMITTEE VACANCIES

30 The Board, Core Committee and Sub-Committees may co-opt any Member to fill any vacancy among their number that arises between one Annual General Meeting and the next, provided that, in the case of the Board and Core-Committee, the appointment is ratified by vote. Secretarial Sub-Committee must also be notified of any and all changes in committee membership.

REMOVAL AND DISQUALIFICATION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

33 A member of the Committee shall cease to hold office if she or he:

33.2 resigns her or his position in person or by written notice to the Board/Core-Committee/Sub-Committee in question (but only if at least 3 members remain in office when the resignation takes effect); or

33.3 is absent without reasonable grounds, in the opinion of the other members of the Board/Core-Committee/Sub-Committee in question, for a period of more than 3 consecutive meetings of the Committee and the remaining members agree to remove her or him; or

33.4 becomes incapable for any reason of managing her or his own affairs and such condition is expected to persist for at least 6 months.

34 The Committee may invite or request the attendance at any of its meetings of any person or representative of any body for the purpose of giving advice, submitting information or evidence, mediating or otherwise assisting it in the conduct of its business. The attendance of such people shall be in a non-voting capacity at the discretion of the Committee and may be for the whole or any part of any meeting.

35 The Committee may invite representatives of Members to attend Committee meetings in a non-voting capacity.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS' INTERESTS

36 Subject to the exceptions of clause 37 no member of the Committee shall hold or gain any interest in property belonging to the Group or receive any payment from the Group in respect of her or his position as a member of the Board or Core Committee.

37 A member of the Committee may be paid all reasonable travel, subsistence and other out-of-pocket expenses incurred by her or him in connection with carrying out her or his duties as a Committee member at the discretion of the Financial Sub-Committee.

APPOINTMENT AND RETIREMENT OF BOARD MEMBERS

38 At the first Annual General Meeting the League shall appoint from among themselves a Chair and a Co-Chair and from among the Secretarial and Financial Sub-Committees a Treasurer and a Secretary.

39 Each board member shall hold office until the end of the next Annual General Meeting at which point she may retire, but may be re-appointed provided that she or he continues to be a member of the Committee.

41 In the event of a Board Member retiring or resigning the League shall appoint a replacement from among themselves at their next general meeting.

42 There shall be an overlap of two months between the retirement of old and appointment of new Board Members, in order to assist new members in learning and adopting the role.

DUTIES OF OFFICE BEARERS

42 The Chair and Co-Chair shall be responsible for Chairing (or else organising another to Chair) meetings of the Board, Core-Committee and of general meetings of the Group.

43 The Treasurer and Financial Committee shall be responsible for keeping financial records, preparing accounts and giving financial reports to the Core-Committee and to general meetings of the Group. Other responsibilities shall include but are not limited to: organising and recording members' payment of membership fees; Organising the payment of all the League's outgoings and the collection of all the League's incoming payments; keeping record of all cash, banking and internet transactions.

44 The Secretary and Secretarial Committee shall be responsible for keeping (or else organising another to keep) minutes of general meetings of the Group and of the Board and Core-Committee and for giving notice of meetings. The Membership Secretary shall handle the administration of all matters relating to the appointment and retirement of members of the Board, the Core-Committee and all Sub-Committees. Other responsibilities shall include but are not limited to: the creation and maintenance of The List in order to record members' details; registering skater names to twoevils; booking practice venues; announcements and communication; publishing meeting minutes; general administration and paperwork.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMITTEE

45 The Board shall meet not fewer than 2 times a year. The Core-Committee shall meet not fewer than 4 times each year. The league shall meet not fewer than 1 time a year. The Secretary shall give at least 28 days' notice of each meeting and the agenda of the business to be conducted shall be made available to attendees in advance.

46 Sub-Committees shall meet on a regular basis as and when required by their duties and responsibilities and shall maintain communication within their committee and also to the League and the Board.

46 No business shall be conducted at any meeting of the Board, Core-Committee or any Sub-Committees unless a quorum is present. 51% of members of the Board/Core-Committee/Sub-Committee, shall comprise a quorum.

47 All business at meetings shall be decided either by general agreement or by a majority vote. All members shall have one vote, but if the votes are equal, or whoever is Chairing the meeting shall have a casting vote.

48 The Board, Core-Committee and Sub-Committees may, from time to time, make and alter any rules for the conduct of its meetings provided that no rule is made which is inconsistent with this constitution.

49 The Sub-Committees may set up any working group for carrying out any task or duty on its behalf. The membership of any working group shall be decided by the Sub-Committee provided that it shall include at least 1 member of the Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee may, at any time, agree to amend or dissolve any working group it has set up.

50 All acts and decisions made by any working group shall be promptly reported back to the Sub-Committee for ratification.

FINANCES AND ACCOUNTS

51 All of the funds of the Group shall be paid into a bank or building society account operated by the Financial Committee in the name of the Group and may only be in furtherance of the Objects of the Group. All cheques drawn on the account shall be signed by at least 1 members of the Financial Committee who are authorised to do so. Where needs be the number of signatories required can be increased.

52 The financial year of the Group shall run from 1st January of one year to the 31st December of the following year.

53. The group is a not for profit organisation. All proceeds from activities of the group shall be spent on resources and expenses for the group.

53 The Group and the Committee shall comply with their statutory duties and subsequent regulations with regard to:

53.1 the keeping of accounting records of the Group;

53.2 the preparation and presentation to members of the Group of such statements of account, balance sheets and financial reports as are required;

53.3 the appointment of auditors or independent examiners of the accounts;

53.4 the making available to the public of the most recent statement of accounts of the Group upon request;

HERITABLE PROPERTY AND TRUSTEES

54 The Committee shall vest the title to all land, buildings and other heritable property held by or in trust for the Group and all investments held by or on behalf of the Group in not fewer than 3 people aged 18 years or over to act as holding trustees.

55 Holding trustees appointed under clause 54 may be, but need not be members of the Group or of its Committee. Any holding trustee appointed by the Committee may be removed and replaced by the Committee as it thinks fit.

56 Holding trustees appointed under clause 54 shall act with respect to the property or investments vested in them only in accordance with the lawful instructions of the Committee and provided they act only in this way and not further or otherwise they shall not be liable for the acts or defaults of the Committee.

AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION

57 This constitution may be amended by a resolution passed by a majority of not less than 51% of the members present and voting at a properly convened Core-Committee meeting. The notice calling the meeting shall include notice of the resolution, setting out the terms of the amendment proposed.

58 No amendment may be made to clause 36 (Committee members' interests), clauses 61 to 63 (dissolution and disposal of assets).

59. No amendment may be made to this constitution that would have the effect of making the group cease to be not for profit.

DISSOLUTION AND DISPOSAL OF ASSETS

61 The Group may be dissolved by a resolution passed by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting at a properly convened general meeting of the Group. The notice of the general meeting shall include notice of the proposed resolution.

62 In the event that a resolution to dissolve the Group is passed any assets remaining after the settlement of any proper debts and liabilities, including the return of those items advanced or on loan and the repayment of the balance of any unspent grant where this is an agreed condition of any donor (whether statutory or otherwise), shall not be distributed among the members of the Group but shall be given to other such organisations having similar Objects to those of the Group.

63 The Committee shall prepare a statement of accounts for the final accounting period of the Group and transmit such statement to all group members. Thereafter the Group shall be declared dissolved.

_____

The persons whose names and signatures appear below are the first members of the Core-Committee elected at the General Meeting on ……27th August 2009……

Signatures. printed names and position of subscribers

Chair

....

Co-Chair

....

Secretary

....

Treasurer

....

Team Captain

....

Co-Captain

....

Referee Spokesperson

....

Bout Management Spokesperson

....

Events Spokesperson

....

Merchandise Spokesperson

....

Website Spokesperson

.....

.....….

Grievance Spokesperson

....

Sports and Training Spokesperson

....

Sports and Training Co-Spokesperson

....

Medical Spokesperson

....

New Skater Spokesperson

....

Sponsorship Spokesperson

....

PR Spokesperson

....

Appendix x Membership Policy 2009

Auld Reekie Roller Girls League Membership Policy:

A skater for the Auld Reekie Roller Girls is considered a member if they have filled all of the following criteria:

* Has skated with ARRG for a minimum of 3 months
* Has passed their WFTDA minimum standards
* Has passed a WTFDA rules test
* Is female
* Is 18 years or older
* Has signed an ARRG waiver form
* Adheres to the ARRG code of conduct
* Pays by a monthly standing order
* Not affiliated with or a member of any other league
* signed the wftda confideniality and non compete agreement

Appendix xi Membership Policy 2011

Auld Reekie Roller Girls League Membership Policy

Competitive Skating Membership for the Auld Reekie Roller Girls is fulfilled by the following criteria:
1. Has skated with ARRG for a minimum of 3 months
2. Has passed WFTDA Minimum Standards within 12 months
3. Has passed a WFTDA rules test within 12 months
4. Is 18 years old or above
5. Has signed the ARRG waiver form
6. Adheres to ARRG Code of Conduct
7. Has signed the WFTDA Code of Conduct
8. Pays by monthly standing order
9. Is not affiliated with any other Women's Flat Track Roller Derby League

Rec Team Membership is as above with the following amendment:
2. Has passed all WFTDA Minimum Standards within 12 months except 25 laps in 5 minutes. Rec Team skaters may be considered full members by achieving 20 laps in 5 minutes.

Appendix xii Proposal for a Team Selection Policy 2009

Team Selection

Who

The “Team” shall be picked by 5 individuals who are all active people within the league. The selection Committee shall be made up from 3 core individuals who shall be the Head Ref and 2 senior coaches. Until the foreseeable future this shall be Ella~Bella Bang~Bang, Maul E Cater and Cain Unstable. The other 2 spaces will be filled on a rotational basis by skaters who form part of the Sports and Training Committee.

When

The “team” for any given bout shall be picked 4 weeks in advance. Once selected the head(s) of Sport and Training shall pass this information on to the Captain/Alternate for them to call and check availability for the bout. If any issues arise the Captain/Alternate shall contact the Selection Committee to resolve said issues(s). Skaters will be notified by the Captain and/or Alternate if they make the team. Individuals will not be informed when they do not make the team. However they are welcome to approach the selection committee and ask for feedback.

How

Each member of the Selection Committee shall have a list of eligible skaters. These skaters will then be scored anonymously on the 5 main criteria (out-lined below) by the committee. The sores shall be out of 5, 5 = exemplar performance, 4 = very good, 3 = satisfactory, 2 = room for improvement & 1 = poor. An average of these scores will be entered into a master team selection sheet. This will allow the selection committee to fairly pick skaters based on a group opinion of each individual skater who is eligible to bout. The selection committee will look for individual skaters with an average score of 3 or higher in all of the 5 main selection criteria’s. If any individual or group of skaters has concerns about not making the team for a particular bout, the selection committee welcomes the opportunity to discuss with them why they have not been picked this time. Skaters can view the master Selection sheet and this will give them areas for development.

Eligibility.

To become Eligible a skater must meet all of the following criteria:

Has passed yearly minimum skills assessment
Pays by monthly/weekly Standing Order
Has been part of the league for a 3 month period
Has had their skater name and number submitted to the master roster.
Has signed a waiver and medical form.
Adheres to the ARRG code of Conduct.

Selection Criteria

To make the team for an upcoming bout, Eligible skaters’ must meet the following criteria:

Has good attendance at ARRG practices (a minimum of 50% over the 3 month period immediately prior to the team selection date will be deemed acceptable)
Gives 100% at all training sessions attended.
Have good communication skills.
Is enthusiastic about the sport, league and progression of the team.
Takes full part in all training activities.

Conducts themselves in a sports-womanly manner.
Is respectful of all other league members
Is receptive and open to criticism and advice given.
Has a good attitude towards others selected in the team.
Has a good understanding of fair play.

Is in no way deemed a risk to Health and Safety (regardless of passing minimum skills assessment)
Is not suffering from a previous injury (skater related or otherwise).
Is not still recovering or just recovered from a previous injury (skater related or otherwise).
Medical conditions which do not directly affect ability to play the game safely will not be deemed a Health and safety risk.
Has shown Growth and Development of skills through recent training sessions.
Has improved in timed drills
Has addressed areas for attention raised by Sport & Training Committee.
Has acted on criticism given.

The following will also be taken into consideration.

A team should be made up from an equal mix of skater skills i. e. not made up from a majority of Jammers. This will ensure a strong and capable team is fielded.
Consideration will also be given to “new bouter’s”
1 place on the team reserved for a “new bouter”.
1 sub place on the team reserved for a “new bouter”.

Skaters missing ARRG practices to allow them to guest skate for another league (only applicable if league has been approached for guest skaters)

In the event that ARRG do not have enough eligible skaters who meet the team selection criteria, other leagues will be approached for guest skaters.

In the event we are approached for guest skaters the same selection criteria will apply.

Not being selected for the team is not an individual skater or group of skaters being penalized; it is simply the result of said skater(s) not meeting the selection criteria. This does not have any affect on said skater(s) eligibility to be selected for the next bout as each selection is made on individual merits.

The Selection Committee would like to make all leamgue members aware that once you meet the eligibility criteria you will be considered during the team selection process. During this process each skater will be looked at individually and a team will be formed from all skaters who meet the requirements of the team selection criteria.

Skaters should be aware that the team selection criteria is continually assessed and should therefore always conduct themselves in a manner which is consider good sports-womanship and should where possible always give 100% at training sessions they are able to attend.

FAQ's

Will my taking a holiday count towards my missed attendance?
Yes. However we look at attendance for the 3 month period immediately prior to team selection. So a holiday should not affect your attendance if you regularly attend while not on holiday.

What if I am still skating even though I am not at training sessions?
If you are not at ARRG training sessions we have no way to guarantee that you are keeping your skills up to standard. Attending ARRG training sessions allows skaters to work together as a team and learn new tactics along with maintaining skills and being assessed.

What if I do not attend ARRG training but instead train with another league?
Training with other leagues is encouraged as it enables us to skill share. However if this results in you missing an ARRG training session this counts as missed training time when looking at the attendance records.

What if I am not attending training but I do attend the Gym regularly?
Attending the gym and taking part in other fitness activities is encouraged however missing ARRG training sessions will still be considered missed training when looking at the attendance records, regardless of maintaining fitness while not training. We have no way to guarantee individuals are doing this.

What if my attendance is just below 50% but 3 weeks before a bout I come back and promise to attend every practice between now and the bout?
The team selection takes place 4 weeks prior to a bout and the attendance window is the 3 months immediately months prior to the team selection. Unfortunately you would not be selected this time as you would have failed to meet all the criteria, however you're continually attendance at practices would be taken into consideration during the next team selection.

What if I am injured but I am still attending practices?
If you are still attending practices while injured your attendance record should remain above 50%. However if you are still injured or recovering at the time of team selection you may not be selected, as your injury may be considered a health and safety risk for both yourself and others.

What happens if I have regularly attended all practices and played in many bouts but then for various reasons my attendance drops below 50%?
Skaters must meet all the criteria to make the team. The attendance record covers the 3 months period immediately prior to the selection for a bout. If attendance then comes back to 50% or above and providing all other criteria is met you will be consider for the team selection again.

Do I have to admit an injury?
Injured skaters are encouraged to advise coaches etc of an injury. This allows coaches to cater some of the training towards your needs and ensure that you will not be pushed to train harder until you are recovered.

What if I do not admit my injury?
Injuries are considered under Health and Safety, so if you do not admit your injury and continue to train hard you may be doing more damage to yourself and could be seriously

endangering your health. If no one is aware of you injury you could still be considered for a team. However this could not only be putting yourself at risk, but also everyone else participating in the bout. This sort of behaviour is actively discouraged.

What if I miss a training session because a league has asked me personally to guest skate for them?
This would count towards missed training time as the selection criteria has not been applied as you have been approached as an individual. Ultimately it is the individual skaters' choice to attend or miss ARRG training time.

Why are there places reserved for "new bouters"?
This encourages all skaters to push themselves at training sessions and encourages all skaters to fully participate as even thought you are new you can still be considered during team selection if you meet all the criteria. This practice means the team will be constantly evolving which ultimately helps all improve.

Why are the captain and alternate not picking the team?
The Captain and Alternate are able to be part of the Selection Process if they sit on the Sports and Training Committee, which is actively encouraged.

I do not understand why I have not been picked?
There could be multiple reasons for not making a team. The Selection Committee is more than welcome to discuss this with individuals. If however a skater feels unfairly treated by the selection process we ask that you approach the Grievance Committee about this issue.

Appendix xiii Team Selection Policy 2011

Travel Team Selection Policy – Auld Reekie Roller Girls

WHO:

The Team shall be picked by 5 individuals who form a 'Selection Committee; these will be made up of:
Referee Committee spoksey
Sports and Training spoksey - alternating
Team Captain - alternating
(Currently Ella Bella Bang Bang, Fay Bentos Mo B Quick, Crazylegs & Bronx)
The other 2 spaces will be filled on a rotational basis by eligible skaters who form part of the Sports and Training selection stomach.

WHEN:

The team for any given travel team bout shall be picked 8 weeks in advance. Once selected, the Team Captain/allocated member of S&T will call and check skaters' availability for the bout. If any issues arise the Captain/Alternate will contact the Selection Committee for resolution. All team rosters will be posted in skater number order on the forum as soon as the team is confirmed.

HOW:

Each member of the Selection Committee shall have a list of eligible skaters. These skaters will then be scored anonymously by the committee on set criteria. These scores shall then be averaged. This will allow the selection committee to fairly pick skaters to make up a team. If any individual or group of skaters has concerns about not making the team for a particular bout the selection committee welcomes the opportunity to discuss with them why they have not been picked this time. Skaters can view the Selection sheet and this will give them areas for development.

ELIGIBILITY:

For all travel teams Skaters must meet the following criteria:

Has passed yearly minimum skills assessment
Has been a full competitive member of the league for a 3 month period
Has signed a waiver and medical form.
Adheres to the ARRG code of Conduct.
Has signed the WFTDA and UKRDA confidentiality agreement
Has above 60% attendance at ARRG practices for the 12 week period immediately prior to the team selection date.
Attends 60% of all practices following selection prior to the bout (if skaters do not meet this, they risk being benched/subbed out for the bout)

SELECTION CRITERIA:

To make any team for an upcoming bout, Eligible skaters must meet the following selection

criteria:

‘Effort and Commitment’
Gives 100% at all training sessions attended.
Displays good communication skills during sessions
Is enthusiastic about the sport, league and progression of the team.
Takes full part in all training activities

‘ Sportswomanship’
Conducts themselves in a sports-womanly manner.
Is respectful of all other league members.
Is receptive and open to criticism and advice given.
Has a good attitude towards others selected in the team.
Has a good understanding of fair play.

‘Health and Safety’
Is in no way deemed a risk to Health and Safety (regardless of passing minimum skills assessment)
Is not suffering from a previous injury (skater related or otherwise).
Is not still recovering or just recovered from a previous injury (skater related or otherwise).
Medical conditions which do not directly affect ability to play the game safely will not be deemed a Health and safety risk.
Does not sit out regularly at practices for injuries, or seem prone to pick up injuries through reckless skating (regularly fouling to an extreme and dangerous extent e.g. kicking skaters, grabbing to pull backwards as falling, both feet in the air to block/hit).

‘Growth and Development’.
Has shown Growth and Development of agility skills through recent training sessions.
Has improved in timed drills, stability, effectiveness on track and knowledge of strategy
Has addressed areas for attention raised by Sport & Training Committee.
Has acted on any criticism given.

Twisted Thistles Selection

The following additional eligibility criteria must be met;

The team for the Twisted Thistles is chosen from the WFTDA roster of 20 skaters. This roster is chosen every 12 weeks by the 2 captains, head(s) of sports and training and the referee spoksey. Criteria for WFTDA selection is as follows:
High attendance – over 60% consistently (including high attendance at previous WFTDA sessions where applicable)
High Skill level demonstrated consistently (4-5 skill level skaters will be fielded first onto the WFTDA 20 provided attendance has been met)
Sound knowledge of game strategy and rules demonstrated, good understanding of tactics at an advanced level

Where 20 skaters cannot be fielded using the above criteria, skaters with consistent attendance above 50% will be considered.

To Note when selecting for the TT team:
Average skill level score of 4 to 5 - If this does not field a full team of 14, a skill level of 3 may be considered, or a short team may be fielded – depending on the team being played. This is at the discretion of the selectors. The TT team will not accommodate more than 2 skaters with a skill level of 3 in any one game and therefore the selectors reserve the right to not field a full team of 14.

A skater with lower than 50% attendance may be selected for the team on a provisional basis where required and must attend all practices between the team selection date and the bout date. If the skater cannot commit to the attendance, another WFTDA skater may be subbed in.

Cannon Belles Selection

The following additional eligibility criteria must be met;

Has a skill level of 1 to 3. See above for skill level definitions.

A WFTDA 20 skater not selected for a Thistles bout will be given priority on selection for the following Belles bout as long as she meets the selection criteria.

General Considerations for all Travel Team Selection:

A team should be made up from an equal mix of skater 'positions' in order to ensure a strong and capable team is fielded.

Not being selected for the team is not an individual skater or group of skaters being penalised; it is simply the result of said skater(s) not meeting the selection criteria. This does not have any affect on said skater(s) eligibility to be selected for the next bout as each selection is made on individual merits.

The Selection Committee would like to make all league members aware that once you meet the eligibility criteria you will be considered during the team selection process. During this process each skater will be looked at individually and a team will be formed from all skaters who meet the requirements of the team selection criteria.

Skaters should be aware that the team selection criteria is continually assessed and should therefore always conduct themselves in a manner which is consider good sportswomanship and should where possible always give 100% at training sessions they are able to attend.

Skill Level Definitions:

5 - Excellent:
*Has pack awareness and is constantly aware of what is happening on track.
*Has full understanding of advanced tactics and strategies.
*Is extremely agile and skill of skating is fluid.
*Has a high level of endurance and can play in 2 to 3 jams in a row for a whole game in a bout situation if needed.
*Has full understanding of the game in a bout situation and of the rules
*Responds instantly to instruction on track.
*Has played in a number of TT bouts in at least every 2 or 3 jams

4 - Very Good:
* Has pack awareness and is usually aware of what is happening on track but not always.
* Has a lot of understanding of advanced tactics and strategies but still has learning to do.
* Is quite agile but skill of skating is not quite fluid yet.
* Endurance is high and could skate in 2 jams in a row in a row for a bout situation if needed.
*Has understanding of the game in a bout situation and of the rules
*Responds quickly to instruction on track
*Starting to play on the TT on a regular basis in at least every 4 to 5 jams.

3 - Good:
* Has some pack awareness and is still needing instruction on track.
* Has understanding of basic tactics and strategies and is responding well to learning advanced tactics and strategies.
* Is starting to get agile and skill of skating is not fluid but improving.
* Endurance is improving and could skate in 2 jams in a row in a bout situation but not for the whole game.
* Is still learning the game in a bout situation and of the rules.
*Responds relatively quickly to instruction on track. Guidance is still needed.

2 - Intermediate:
* Has some pack awareness but this still needs worked on to become habit.
* Has basic understanding of tactics and strategies.
* Is not particularly agile yet and skill of skating is not fluid.
* Endurance is still needing work. Might not be able to skate 2 jams in a row for a whole game in a bout situation without tiring easily.
* Has basic understanding of the game in a bout situation and of the rules.
* Does respond to instruction on track but guidance is always needed.

1 - Newer skater passed minimums:
*New skater passed minimums
*Could be on the Belles if they have scrimmaging experience.
*No pack awareness
*Has not bouted at all yet
*Not very much understanding yet of the game in a bout situation but understands the rules (because you *have* to and shouldn't be put on team if you don't)

Appendix xiv Attendance Policy 2011

Attendance Policy

Attendance points reflect how much valuable time on skates someone has had, and therefore their suitablity for bouting. As such, people who are not skating, coaching, or actively helping coach (at the request of the coach ONLY) will not recieve attendance points. If people wish to attend practice in order to familiarise themselves with tactics or what is being learned then that is for their own benefit, and is obviously encouraged, but will not be considered an active part of practice unless their help is requested by the coach. This does not reflect time on skates and therefore does not equal attendance points. People who sit out at all, arrive late or leave early without informing the coach why, will only receive 1 attendance point, if any.

The distribution of points will be done according to the following guidelines:

2= attended and skated at an ARRG practice
2= coaching at an ARRG practice
2= travelling to play or NSO at an away bout on a practice day
2=NSOing in a bout
2=Playing in a bout
2=NSOing or being lineup manager at a bout night
2=Wise owling on FMS

1= showing up late/leaving early (by 30 minutes or more).
1=Sitting out of practice with an injury (at the coach's discretion, even if you skated the rest of practice)
1= travelling/attending an away bootcamp on a practice day
1= arrg other- representing arrg at another leagues practice - to coach etc or attending derby workshops/meetings on a practice day (*with prior S&T or secretarial knowledge*)
1 = Practicing with another league on a practice day. (it is the responsibility of the skater to inform secretarial)
1= ARRG other (Representing arrg at an away conference like EROC etc on a practice day - it is the responsibility of the skater to inform secretarial)
1= Guest skating with another team on a practice day (it is the responsibility of the skater to inform secretarial)
1= Travelling to guest skate with another team on a practice day (it is the responsibility of the skater to inform secretarial)

All attendance points shall be given at the discretion of the coach. If the coach feels someone has not participated to their full ability then they may inform the person taking attendance and the skater in question that they will be recieving only 1 or no attendance points. Coaches must take attendance and submit it to Secretarial no more than 24 hours after practice to be added to the Master Sheet.

You have *2 weeks* to inform Secretarial (everyone@secretarial.arrg.co.uk) of a mistake with your attendance points for the day in question. After that the points will not be added.

It shall not be possible to receive more than 2 points for any given day.

Please check your attendance regularly here:
https://spreadsheets1.google.com/spread ... y=CNmqmMcE

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